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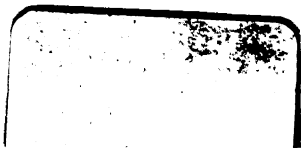
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THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT



THEODORE BURT SAYRE

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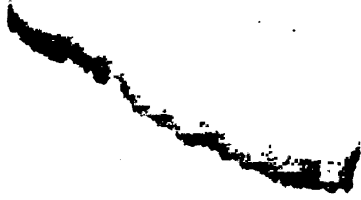
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THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

A DRAMATIC ROMANCE
BEING THE MEMOIRS WRITTEN
BY LORRIMER WEATHERBY, SOME-
TIME CAPTAIN IN PRINCE RUPERT'S
HORSE, AND LATER MASTER OF
FENCE IN LORING'S CUIRASSIERS
DONE INTO MODERN ENGLISH BY
THEODORE BURT SAYRE



1900

HARPER & BROTHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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TO

JAMES K. HACKETT

WHOSE UNFAILING ENCOURAGEMENT AND MANY
VALUABLE SUGGESTIONS ARE HEREWITH
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED
BY THE AUTHOR

NOTE

IF to the reader the absence of many obsolete oaths as well as certain archaic grammatical formations peculiar to the period should seem strange, I would say, in the words of Captain Weatherby himself, "When a man thirsts and is given a full tankard for his refreshment, it is the contents that he concerns himself with and not the crook of the handle." So I trust that many alterations and simplifications which I have made in copying this tale from the original manuscript now in the possession of a prominent collector will not be looked upon in the light of an impertinence.

T. B. S.

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THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

Book One
THE LOVE-STORY OF LADY CLARE

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

CHAPTER I

HOW LORRIMER WEATHERBY RODE TO THE GRENVILLE
ARMS AND WAS MUCH ENLIGHTENED

IF I had been told in my young days, when a roaring, rakehelly captain in Prince Rupert's Horse, that in the shadow of old age I should find a little light and gayety in turning clerk, I would have laughed in my informant's face; but so it has come to pass, and now I, Lorrimer Weatherby, England's greatest master of fence, am sitting down to weave into a romance certain misfortunes and adventures which befell three sturdy Englishmen during the span of years that runs from the days of the Lord Protector to the present winter of 17—. While I am not entirely unread, I lay no claim to particular cunning in the art of word-stringing, and already I am confronted by an obstacle.

Where and how shall I begin? Shall I start my narrative with an account of my first meeting with Gabriel Carleycroft in the heat of battle on Round-

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way Down, or date the first of my story from the day that I became guardian of the sturdy six-year-old heir to the baronetcy of Grenville?

For a moment I lay down the quill and seek to draw wisdom from my pipe. Now I remember that oft-times when a lad and one of a pack of boys bent on a swimming frolic, I have noted that many of them would circle round the pool in doubt as to which side offered the most enticement for a plunge. Not so with me. I had no mind for shivering on a bank. A leap, a splash, and I was in. Two strokes, and the chill was gone, and while they stood shaking in the cool breeze I floundered lustily in the pond. It is this plan I have decided to follow in my book-making; and so, without further parley, I dive into the circumstances of my story.

After a brisk morning walk, on returning to the barracks of the regiment of Puritan cavalry to which I had been assigned as fencing-master, I found a letter from my good friend Gabriel Carleycroft awaiting me. It was short and grave, as were all his utterances, and ran as follows:

“FRIEND WEATHERBY,—When we last met, you still insisted that I, in securing your appointment as fencing-master to the Lord Protector’s favorite regiment of cavalry, had placed you under an obligation which you would be most happy to discharge on the first opportunity. Should you be of the same mind now, meet me at the Inn of the Grenville Arms, on

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the highway, some two leagues from Dulverton, to-morrow evening. If you decide to come, I pray you be not later than nine. I shall reach there some time during the night, but at what hour it is impossible to foretell, so do not grow impatient if I am tardy. The hostess is a lady after your own heart and the inn a comfortable place; moreover, I promise you romance and adventure that should be sufficiently stirring to satisfy even your unquiet disposition. As I assume you will not disappoint me, believe me, ever your well-wisher,

“GABRIEL CARLEYCROFT.”

Though this letter, which bore the date of the preceding day, was hardly such as would be expected to pass between bosom friends, I do not believe that two such dissimilar men were ever closer cronies than I, wild roisterer that I was, and this same dignified young Puritan officer. I admired him for his proud reserve and many, to me impossible, virtues; while he looked with a tolerant eye on my numerous faults, for, in spite of many follies, I was a good-natured dog, though in those days dearly fond of a quarrel and scarcely squeamish as to how it began or ended. It was due to his influence with the Earl of Essex that I secured my billet to Loring's Cuirassiers, and I in my turn had made him the equal of any swordsman in England, not excepting myself, for I even taught him the secret of the wonderful thrust which Pietro Carcarni, the Italian master of fence, and I, together, invented. As Pie-

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tro died soon afterwards from over-indulgence at the table, I, in compliment to his memory, christened the result of our combined skill the Dart of Sicily, and it was on the knowledge of this trick that much of my reputation rested.

I had no thought but to do as Carleycroft desired, so after dinner I easily secured leave of absence, and, when four came, mounted my horse to ride gayly along the highway, until, after five hours of tolerably speedy travelling, I drew rein before the inn of the Grenville Arms.

It was a cold winter's night, and the road and fields were spread with a coverlid of snow which had fallen the day before. A chill wind blew and the frost seemed fast increasing as I turned into the slice of roadway that led to the inn, from whose windows came a cheery light. The hostess herself, a fair, red-cheeked, buxom dame of thirty or thereabouts, made me welcome at the door, and to my surprise called me by name. For a moment I was at fault, and then suddenly I remembered her. She was the daughter of a deep-drinking, hard-hitting sergeant in my old troop of Prince Rupert's Horse, and had married, as I had heard at the time, an inn-keeper named Killigrew. This tavern had been his, and, since a benign Providence and a tertiary fever had carried him off, fair Mistress Kitty was now sole owner of the Grenville Arms.

I saluted the good woman with a kiss on either cheek, as is my custom if the dame be fair to look upon, and followed her and her blushes into the

AT THE GRENVILLE ARMS

common-room of the inn, while a pasty-faced hostler ostentatiously assumed charge of my horse.

"The night is bitter cold," remarked Mistress Killigrew, laying the cloth.

"Yet your cheek is warm, good dame," said I.

"That is more than I can say of your lips, Captain Weatherby," she answered, saucily.

I proceeded to warm them after a fashion pleasing alike to all men and women of a certain youth, and then sat down before the fire chuckling at her pretence of discomfiture.

"'Twas merely to thaw my mouth," I explained, "for, as you doubtless have observed, Kitty, my heart has not been chilled by my journey."

"Kitty, indeed!" answered she, tossing her pretty head. "Keep on, Sir Free-and-Easy, and you will find I have claws of my own and can use them."

"Which will only serve to make more enjoyable the moments when you condescend to purr," I answered, with a laugh, for I knew women too well to think a kiss or so from a handsome cavalier could be aught but welcome.

"As to calling you Kitty, it would be absurd to title a mere slip of a lass like you Mistress Killigrew," I added.

"You have lost none of your assurance, Captain," she replied, with a roguish glance in my direction that nearly cost her some of her crockery, for a plate fell clattering on the table.

"True," said I, rising to chuck her double chin,

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"and if it is as well kept as your good looks, I'll not be lacking in impudence for years to come."

"You always were famed for your glib tongue," said she, but she smiled in spite of herself as she tripped to and fro preparing my supper.

I affected to pay her no attention, but sat toasting before the fire until she flitted within reach. Then I promptly placed one arm around her and drew her down beside me on the bench.

"How can I set the table?" she protested, though her efforts to escape were half-hearted at best.

"Let the supper wait," I said. "It's a month since I've squeezed a waist like yours."

"If my dead husband could see you—"

"Well, if he should?" I asked.

"He would turn over in his grave," she gasped, for my grip was over-tight.

"Then he must be quite a tumbler by this time, or the cavaliers who pass here do not know a pretty face when they see it."

She shook with laughter at the jest, so I felt encouraged, and held her close.

"How long have you been a widow, Kitty?"

"Six years come next Michaelmas Day," she answered, with a sigh.

"And has no one tried to fill Killigrew's place in all that time?"

"Indeed, you are wrong," she answered, quickly.

"Scarcely a month passes without some great oaf of a farmer asking for the inn and its owner."

"Then I marvel—"

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"Do you think it so marvellous?" she snapped, affecting to misunderstand, as women often do when in search of a compliment. I decided to gratify her in this instance.

"That they took a refusal causes me wonderment," I replied.

"'Tis because I have made up my mind to marry none but a soldier."

This she said with a soft glance at me that seemed almost an invitation.

"Now that I think of it, I *am* hungry," I remarked, hastily, scenting danger at once, for I am not and never have been what is termed a marrying man. She pouted a little as she rose, but supper was soon ready, and behind the table, intrenched with viands and a stout bottle, I felt bolder, and returned recklessly to the subject.

"So you would wed a soldier?" said I. "Well, are there none to please you in the neighborhood? What of stout Captain Carleycroft, who commands the cavalry troop barracked a few miles from here?"

"A grave gentleman, who has no eyes for a pretty face—at least so his troopers tell me," she answered.

Then she went on with her nose in the air, as though scorning the bad taste of my absent friend:

"He is quartered at the house of old Sir Reginald Berkely, and never comes here."

I had often heard of the place, for it was much gossiped of on account of certain mysterious happenings there during the war, when the adherents of

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Parliament found to their cost that its owner was an exceedingly slippery customer to handle.

"Indeed?" said I. "An old rookery it is, too. Rumor has it that it is more like a fort than a dwelling, with numerous secret passages to escape by in time of need."

"It was built before the war," she answered, "and I have heard it said that Sir Reginald saw trouble coming between the King and Parliament, so drew his plans accordingly."

The clock at this moment struck ten with a merry, jingling chime.

"That reminds me, Captain Carleycroft is to meet me here this evening."

"Is it so?" she cried. "At what time?"

"Whenever he sees fit to get here," I answered. "More wine, pretty Kit, and drink with me."

As she placed another flagon on the board I flipped a gold piece into the air with my thumb.

"It is little of Carleycroft's money goes for such swill," I said, catching the coin as it fell.

"Does he not drink wine?" she asked in surprise, as she filled a goblet for herself.

"Not he, but, for all that, he is as fine a blade as ever woman smiled on."

Then, remembering he never mentioned such a happening, I added:

"Though if they did smile on him I much doubt he would notice it. A handsome man and one with spirit as high as any ruffler in spite of his grave ways."

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"What manner of man can he be if he likes neither wine nor women, and yet is a comrade of yours?" she said, curiously.

"Oh, he has his reasons," I answered, pledging her with my glass.

"And what may they be?"

Truly women are ever inquisitive, though with that there is really little fault to be found, for if they did not keep poking their dainty noses into the concerns of others, many most gallant deeds of rescue would never have been done, and much credit lost to our own sex in consequence.

"He does not drink wine because his father died a drunkard's death in a way-side ditch, and he fears lest he might wake a sleeping appetite to prove his ruin," I explained.

"Ah, that I can understand," said she. "But why does he shun women?"

"'Tis a riddle to me, Kitty. It must be because he is a fool."

"A fool?" she echoed.

"That is to say, a Puritan, which is almost the same thing, though I should be ashamed to call one to whom I am so greatly indebted such a name."

"His conduct justifies you," she answered, tossing her head in scorn.

"Of course," I continued, "sooner or later he will meet the woman fated to mate with him. All men do, more's the pity. Now I have met *several* such ladies, but accident has prevented a really decisive misstep so far"; and, raising my glass, I drank

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most heartily to Accident, which toast having exhausted the supply of wine, another bottle became necessary.

"How came you acquainted with this Captain Carleycroft?" was Mistress Kit's next question.

As this was a topic which called for all my powers of eloquence to do it justice, I stopped eating long enough to tell her the story of our first meeting, our several subsequent encounters and passages at arms on different fields of battle, and, lastly, how I fell prisoner to him at Naseby, from which event dated the friendship that had since endured. Now, while I, up to this time, had had the inn to myself, a number of the neighboring rustics began to straggle in, one by one, until a goodly number had gathered for their evening drinking-bout. My meal finished, having little taste for their garrulous company, I retired to a corner of the hearth to sit, watching Kitty as she bustled back and forth supplying the wants of the yokels. As the wine had warmed me, I soon ceased wondering at their pointless wit and silly laughter, and, feeling drowzy, dozed off. When I awoke it was thanks to a vigorous shaking from Mistress Kit.

"Your friend is coming," she said, "and high time, too, I vow. It is now long after midnight."

I staggered to my feet, cramped from long sitting in one position, and found that the inn was empty, save for us.

Flinging the door open, I strode out on the path. Sure enough, a horseman was coming down the

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highway at a lively gait, with another nag trotting riderless behind him.

"You are prompt, indeed, Captain," I shouted, for I recognized him in the moonlight as he drew nearer.

He dismounted and threw the reins to the hostler as he answered:

"I warned you that I might be late."

"True enough," replied I, leading the way to the fire, "but this is a strange hour for a staid gentleman like you to be prowling on the highway. Pray, give an account of yourself?"

As Carleycroft undid his cloak, his gaze rested upon the bottles near me. His face fell and I heard him mutter. I could imagine what it was, for he hated the very sight of drink.

"Yours?" he asked.

As there were only three empty, I felt no compunction in admitting their ownership.

"Don't let them bother you," I said, cheerfully. "I'm good for at least three more. Have a mouthful yourself. It will warm you."

He waved me back with a gesture of displeasure, as I had expected.

"Not so," said he. "The taint of liquor is in my blood. If ever I should begin, I feel that it would soon master me as it did my unfortunate father. You remember how he died, Lorrimer?"

I nodded, for it was Carleycroft himself who had told me.

"Since you will not drink, I will have to do the

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honors," said I, uncorking another bottle as I spoke. "Now, man of mystery, tell me what brings you out at such an hour? And if you will make clear why you lead an extra horse with a lady's saddle strapped on his back, you will find me your very obedient servant."

I tossed off my wine and helped myself to another glass while he hesitated, and, crossing the room, stood for a moment leaning on the mantel as he stared down in the blaze.

"Of course, there is a woman in it," I suggested.

He nodded solemnly, and, as I laughed, turned and stood with his back to the fire.

"Lorrimer," he began, slowly, "I am in love."

This was said with so sad an air that for the life of me I could not help chuckling, for I had never found love a serious matter. He waited patiently for my merriment to cease, and I remember even now what a great, handsome fellow he was as he stood there. He was over six feet tall, and had broad shoulders and narrow hips that shaped prettily into long, muscular legs, slightly bowed from much riding. His hair was yellow and wavy, and worn rather long for a Puritan. His eyes were blue, and beneath his rather large mouth the chin's firm lines stood for a will that would brook little opposition.

"I am quite prepared to have you play the fool," he answered, gravely, tolerant of my mirth.

"Why," said I, "it is not Weatherby who is in love," and I laughed again, for I felt in really ex-

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cellent humor, though not in the slightest degree intoxicated.

"Have you ever heard of Sir Julien Grenville?" he asked.

With difficulty I avoided smiling in his face at the question. Of course I had heard of Sir Julien Grenville, the most rancorous and uncompromising of all our dead King's adherents. The grim old cavalier was in those times a great figure in the world of science and philosophy, though of his private life one heard absolutely nothing. It was only when some new analysis or original application of already familiar forces to uses of art or commerce brought his name to the lips of every one that the world at large was cognizant of the crabbed old fellow's existence. Nor is it strange that this should be so, for, after the failure of the royal cause to which he had been devoted heart and soul, he retired to the country, and, in the society of a few malecontents like himself, passed his waking hours in research and invention.

"I see you know of him," continued Carleycroft.

"Certainly," I answered. "It was his plate melted down that paid for the equipments of the cavalry regiment in which I had the honor of serving as captain under the command of gallant Prince Rupert himself."

"A great soldier, but a man of most immoral tendencies," observed Carleycroft; then, seeing that I was preparing to defend the reputation of our famous cavalry leader, he hastily continued: "When

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the war ended, Sir Julien retired to his country estates which were not confiscated."

"For that there was a devilish good reason," I interrupted. "Old Noll well knew which side of his bread was spread with butter. He thought the old cavalier's learning too valuable to England to be carried abroad. Devil take the Lord Protector!"

As I spoke I converted this expression of ill-will into a toast with the aid of the wine-bottle. Carleycroft stepped quickly towards me, and, seizing the remaining flagon, which was as yet unopened, smashed it in the fire.

"No more wine to-night, if you would serve me, Lorrimer," he said, sternly, as Mistress Kit, who had entered in time to see the sad disaster which befell her excellent liquor, looked indignantly at him, and left the room with a very audible sniff of disgust.

"Deuce take it!" cried I, regretfully, as a little stream of red wine ran out of the blaze and across the hearth, only to be eagerly licked up by a hungrily pursuing tongue of flame.

"Surely, Gabriel, you have forgotten the precepts you would have me follow, for if this be not wilful waste I am no judge."

He grew angry in a moment, as most zealous people will if you turn their arguments against them.

"Come, come," he said, impatiently, "you rode here to help me in an enterprise of moment, not to spend the night in wine-bibbing. You have had more than is good for you already, but you shall

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choose for yourself. Will you remain sober and give me your aid, or would you rather make a night of drinking here and let me carry out my plans as best I can alone?"

Before I could answer the door opened, and in walked Mistress Killigrew with another flagon of wine, which she set noisily on the table with a defiant glance at Carleycroft. Then, turning her back on him, she stalked out with her chin in the air, and slammed the door behind her. I could not refrain from laughing at her performance, but before I had more than uncorked the bottle Carleycroft wrenched it from my grasp with no gentle hand.

"One more drop," he cried, "and we part company, not for to-night alone, but for good and all!"

Alas, I but little thought how true his words would prove in the years to follow, for, in spite of him, when we rode from the inn that night I carried under my belt the contents of another flagon, and from that single indulgence sprang all the troubles and misfortunes which were to befall us in the coming years. I swore gently to myself as he laid down the bottle.

"I will give you your own way," I growled. "Go on with your story."

"Grenville Hall is but a mile from here."

"I know the place, I fancy. A house of brick almost concealed from view by vines and trees, with a park surrounded and hidden by a high stone wall."

"You describe it perfectly, Lorrimer," said he.

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"Sir Julien leads the life of a recluse within its limits. Save for the coming and going of a deaf-mute steward, he has no dealings with the surrounding country."

"Small wonder," I interrupted. "You could scarcely expect a royal stag to live in amity with a pack of Roundhead wolves. The old fellow is right, and as for his steward, to my mind, a deaf-mute must make an ideal servant or a perfect wife. Egad, I would that same steward had a pretty daughter enjoying the same blessings. I would not look farther for a bride if I could win her, I assure you."

Carleycroft's eyes twinkled, as they often did while he listened to what he called my nonsense, but his face remained grave as ever as he continued:

"Perhaps you have heard that Sir Julien has a daughter?"

"Not I, though the old buck might have a dozen for all I know," I answered.

"Your ignorance is not to be wondered at," replied he, poking the fire until it cracked and snapped in a lively fashion.

"For years," he continued, "she was kept at school in London, and it is only a few months ago that her father brought her to live with him at Grenville Hall."

"Has Sir Julien a wife?" I asked.

"Not he. She died years ago, and he has not married again."

"Truly," said I, "that last remark is unnecessary. The scientist might marry *once* in search of

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knowledge, but the philosopher would prevent a repetition of the blunder."

This last observation had a fine, cynical ring to it that pleased me rarely, and I resolved to remember it for future use at the barracks, where I had some little reputation as a wit.

"If she is her father's daughter, she will not exchange calls with her neighbors, for they are all psalm-singing, beggarly, blue-nosed sons of Bible texts—"

"You are quite right," he interrupted. "I have yet to meet one of the country folk who can claim her acquaintance, but that is hardly to be wondered at, for even the servants never leave the grounds from one end of the year to the other. In fact, dismissal is the penalty for such disobedience."

"Humph!" said I. "Who would not love to be in the service of Sir Julien? Now, no one hates a really dyed-in-the-wool fanatic more than I do, but I would sally forth among them if I were he, were it only for the pleasure of bumping their silly heads together when they chanced to anger me, which I promise you would be often. Do you know the old fire-eater, Gabriel?"

"Not I."

"But it is his daughter you love?" I persisted, a trifle mystified.

"Quite true."

"Then your meetings are clandestine," I cried, with a roar of laughter. "Nice business for a saint like you, Gabriel. Hang me, your conduct seems

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more befitting a graceless rogue like me than for such an earnest toiler in the vineyard of righteousness."

Even in those days his glance was so quick and fierce that it was more than most men could face without lowering their gaze, and as I mocked him an angry scowl drove the laughter from my lips.

"Well, go on," I said, soberly. "I did but jest."

"Heaven forbid that I should deny the impropriety of my behavior were the attending circumstances of a different character," he said.

"Of course, it is none of his business whom his daughter marries," said I, roguishly. "I admit that, so pray continue."

"As you know," Carleycroft went on, without troubling to notice my irony, "the old partisan is famous for his hatred of the Commonwealth, and would sooner see her dead than wedded to a Puritan."

"But if she has no liberty, how came you acquainted?" I asked.

"Lady Clare—" he began.

"Clare," I cried. "A lovely name. Is she so called? Clare! I like it rarely. It has a full, melodious ring to it very different from the Scripture-prigged names of your Roundhead damsels."

He seemed rather pleased at my approval, which did not surprise me, for I have often noticed that to a lover the admiration of another man for his lady or any of her belongings is always grateful, though he be no more than a chimney-sweep who

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yields the tribute, for such is the vanity of man, and, as for women, I fully believe, in the absence of gallants, any damsel would gladly don an extra ribbon if it but secured for her one more wag of the tail from a passing puppy dog.

"She is unhappy, owing to the simple, uneventful life she is obliged to lead in obedience to her father's commands."

"And, of course, disobeys him whenever she gets the chance," said I. "That is a way that maids have."

He nodded his head in reply.

"I do not blame her at all," I said. "I would see him hanged before I would be cooped up in his yard."

"At times when the place became quite unbearable it was her custom to creep out of the gate and stroll along the shady lanes by herself. One day she clambered into a tree, and, owing to the breaking of a branch, fell, spraining her ankle."

"And you, of course, arrived at the critical moment and went to the rescue. Quite like a hero of romance, Gabriel. Egad, Ben Jonson could have made a play of it."

"Since it was from attempting to get a better glimpse of me as I passed on the highway that she fell," he answered, smiling at the recollection, "I could do nothing else. Hearing her cry of pain, I discovered her and proffered my assistance, which she accepted gladly enough."

"I can quite believe that," I remarked. "Eyes

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were not given to women that they might fail to see handsome dogs like you and me, Gabriel?"

"To shorten my tale, she rode back to the park gate on my horse, and there I left her at her request for fear of being seen by Sir Julien. We parted with the promise of another meeting; one led to another, and finally we became betrothed."

"Ah, ha! and now you intend to carry her off and marry her, eh?"

He laughed softly to himself before he answered.

"We were married two months ago," he said.

I rose to my feet in astonishment.

"What?"

Carleycroft sat looking up at me with a smile on his face, enjoying my surprise.

"At my request Master Fairchild, the chaplain of our regiment, rode with me one day to our trysting-place, and we were married by him under the trees," he answered.

"Then why have you not claimed her before? If such a dainty armful of girlhood belonged to me, I would not leave it at so inconvenient a distance," I said, quite puzzled by the fellow. I never had known a truly religious man to let his wife get very far away from him before.

"Because, thanks to a scoundrelly attorney, my affairs were so entangled that until recently I could not provide for her as is befitting."

I quite understood the matter now. The girl feared her father's wrath, and, though already a bride, preferred elopement, with its resulting oppor-

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tunity for parental reflection and philosophizing, and so my friend found himself in the droll adventure of *running away with his own wife*. As most of the similar affairs in which my friends and I had taken part had been shared by other men's spouses, this presented features of unusual interest at the outset, and its oddity caught my fancy at once. It reminded me of a story told me by no less a man than jolly Prince Rupert himself, about a cavalier who had taken an active part in so many intrigues that, when he did finally marry, he was so used to stealth that he always entered his wife's room by a rope ladder hung from the window, and never left it by the door without carrying his naked sword in his hand lest he might be set upon, the result being that when the good lady saw fit to amuse herself with another gallant the rascal would always stalk boldly in with all the airs of a proprietor, confident of never encountering the husband, whose coming was sure to be announced by certain mysterious signals from a tree outside. I have always thought that I should like to meet that good dame, as I told his Highness at the time.

Carleycroft rose and began wrapping his cloak about him, so I followed his example.

"At two," he said, "we three will ride from the gate of the park, and be miles away by sunrise."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To London. I have leave of absence for a month, and we intend to spend our honeymoon in

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sight-seeing. You will leave us, and return to the barracks at sundown to-morrow."

"But the hour? Is it not a strange one for an elopement?" I said, wonderingly.

"There is a good reason for its selection," he answered. "Sir Julien went to visit his friend and fellow-scientist, Lord Rokeby, this morning, promising if he returned to-night he would reach Grenville Hall before twelve. As I rode by the house this evening a light in Clare's window signalled that he had not yet arrived, and since then I have watched the highway. Evidently he has decided to spend the night with his friend, and when he reaches home to-morrow we will be far on our way to London."

He called Mistress Kit and paid the reckoning while we waited for our horses.

"Come," said he, and stepped outside the door into the flood of moonlight. I pretended to have lost something, and did not follow him for a moment, which sufficed for me to snatch a kiss from Kitty's not unwilling lips before I drained the contents of the last wine bottle. Immediately it was down I felt that I had made a mistake, for my head swam for a second, but I shook off the dizziness and leaped into the saddle briskly enough, and in another moment we were flying along the highway toward Grenville Hall.

CHAPTER II

MISTRESS KILLIGREW WRITES OF TWO WORTHIES AT THE GRENVILLE ARMS

NOW that I have set down in my plainest writing a brief account of how I rode to the Grenville Arms to meet Gabriel Carleycroft, I feel as I review the events that are to be embodied in the remainder of my narrative that in justice to the story I must in many instances depart from the personal manner of its telling, so for the enlightenment of any who may have persevered to follow the tale thus far, and may think it strange that I write so authoritatively of happenings wherein I took no part, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to many of the persons concerned, who very kindly aided me in the preparation of these memoirs with their own recollections of the incidents herein set forth. These reminiscences I have woven together with all the skill at my command, and if the interest of the story be sufficiently strong to make up for the lack of grace exhibited in the telling, I shall rest satisfied with the result of my labor.

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STATEMENT OF CATHERINE KILLIGREW

Written at the request of Captain Lorrimer Weatherby.

Since it is always hard for a woman to refuse any request made by a handsome, dashing blade like Captain Weatherby, I have promised to set down in my best hand all that took place at the Grenville Arms after he and his sour-faced friend went helter-skeltering along the highway with a riderless horse clattering behind their own.

He has written of his coming to the inn, and of his free-and-easy way of making himself at home, which I was too good-hearted to resent, for he was a gay and pretty gentleman in those days, though a trifle over-sure of his own good looks, and more than a little too boastful and quarrelsome for an altogether decent churchwoman to approve of without some doubting. But after he had gone the inn seemed dreary enough, and, after clearing up the dishes, I was about to lock up for the night and go to bed, when I heard the sound of hoofs on the highway, and, scenting more trade, threw open the door to find that a couple of travellers had turned into the road leading to the tavern. Captain Weatherby and his friend had led an extra horse, but these two gentlemen had only one between them, and that poor nag quite worn out with carrying double; so I could see at a glance that reaching the inn was a godsend to the weary beast, to say nothing of the riders, who were both men well along in years. At first I believed that the gentlemen were

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unknown to me, but as they passed through the doorway I recognized the elder and taller of the two as Sir Julien Grenville, whose great hall lay but a mile farther along on the highway. He was a thin, elderly man, with an eye fierce enough to go through you like a gimlet, and his voice never sounded a note that was not as harsh and ugly as his lean and scarred old face. That he was a great man no one could doubt, but even that did not excuse his ill-tempered ways and horrible oaths, for every other word he uttered was a foul curse or a sneer.

"Wine, woman," he snarled; "your best, and quickly."

"Yes, Sir Julien," said I, with a courtesy; and as I went to fetch it I could hear him through the open doorway cursing because I had recognized him.

"It is not from mingling with the common herd, I'll swear," he growled. "I have no visitors, and since the death of our ever-sainted Monarch I go out but little. The neighborhood is a nest of Round-head vipers; and since it is impossible to set one's heel upon them, I avoid the paths which they beslime with their coming and going."

The stool he was drawing towards the fire upset, and he kicked it across the room with a malediction horrible to hear. Then he fell to cursing the Lord Protector and the Commonwealth, but more particularly his neighbors, whom he seemed to regard as less than the dirt beneath his feet. His companion, a stout, cheery-faced old gentleman, paid no heed to Sir Julien's spleen, but sat staring into the fire.

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"You are not listening," snapped the baronet.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Julien. Really such remarkable proficiency in the use of bad language is deserving of wrapt attention."

"You must have your joke, Rokeby," sneered Sir Julien. "As though any profanity could fitly describe these king-killing dogs about us. Bah! How I hate the scoundrels!"

Then, seeing that his fellow-traveller paid him scant attention, he gave him an ugly look and asked what thought he found so absorbing.

Lord Rokeby—for now I knew him—sighed.

"I was thinking of my horse," he answered. "Poor Dick! We were good friends, Dick and I. Many are the miles I have ridden on his back, and now the poor beast lies stiffening at the road-side with a bullet from my own pistol in his brain."

As he spoke I noticed a queer catch in his voice, almost like a sob, but he cleared his throat and went on more steadily:

"When a man of my age and lonely ways becomes attached to an animal, it is a sad blow to suddenly lose its companionship and faithful service. I would give a finger from my right hand, aye, even more, if it would give me back old Dick, with his broken leg mended and well."

"And yet," said Sir Julien, "he was but a brute beast, and there are many other horses, Rokeby."

"He was my best friend, Julien. One by one they fall away. First my dear lady, then my old servant Gregory—last summer I buried him—and

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now my good nag. No doubt you think it unmanly of me to be so grieved, but you, who are married—”

Sir Julien swore so savagely that Lord Rokeby paused in amazement.

“Do you think I get either love or companionship from the new Lady Grenville? Can you imagine me seeking comfort from the pert tongue of a twenty-year-old girl? Save to avoid me, she has no other thought; and I—well, I find but little pleasure in listening to the complainings of a spoiled child.”

This was news. There was a mistress in Grenville Hall after all. Sir Julien lived so aloof from his neighbors that we had no real knowledge of either himself or his household. I entered with the wine at this moment, and the interruption prevented Lord Rokeby answering.

“Your liquor, gentlemen,” said I. “Is it your intention to honor the inn with your presence to-night?”

“If you have no objection, we will seek shelter here,” began Sir Julien, with a fierce politeness that was less to my relish than mere rudeness.

“Stay,” said Lord Rokeby, laying his hand on Sir Julien’s arm as he spoke. “It is a shame that for fault of mine you must sleep in a tavern, with your own hall so near. I pray you ride on alone. In the morning I will join you, for I must confess I am little able to go farther to-night.”

“No,” answered the baronet; “even if I did as you suggest, I would have to arouse all the household

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to gain an entrance. I ordered that the hall should be closed for the night at twelve, and my servants know better than to disobey any command of mine even in my absence. We will sleep here to-night, and ride over together in the early morning."

"But," said his friend, "will not Lady Grenville be alarmed?"

This time, instead of swearing, Sir Julien laughed softly to himself in a nasty, venomous way.

"My absence never troubles my lady," said he; then, turning to me, "When we are ready to retire, we will call you, woman."

I went out of the room, but I left the door open. There was always much mystery about Grenville Hall, and I thought perhaps I might hear something to make clear some of its puzzlements. Either they did not notice that the door was ajar, or did not care, for they went on talking as before.

"I never aspired to be loved by any woman but my first wife," I heard Sir Julien say. "When she died, I knew no other woman could be to me as she had been."

"Then why did you marry again?"

"That is simple enough," he answered, gruffly. "Feeling the need of some one to look after my house and minister to my wants, I married Hugh Burlyn's daughter, and installed the girl as Lady Grenville at my hall a month after her father died, leaving her penniless and alone in London. A nice bargain I made, too. She's none too good a housewife, and is over-fond of romance reading, to say

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nothing of her inclination for many pamphlets writ by some vagabond play-actor whose name has slipped my memory."

"Will Shakespeare, doubtless," suggested the other.

"The very man. Why, it is only last week I found her in a corner blubbering over a queer tale or play called 'Romeo and His Mary Anne.'"

"No, no," said Lord Rokeby; "Juliet was the poor damsel's name. A most beautiful romance truly. I like it exceedingly myself."

"Perhaps Burlyn taught her such foolishness," answered Sir Julien. "He was a dreamer always."

"Poor Hugh!" murmured his lordship. "I knew him well, Julien. We were close friends in our youth."

"As for Clare," continued the other, "I do not ask for her love. I am an ugly old dog at best, and see naught but folly in sentiment. Let her keep my honor untarnished by the breath of shame, her eyes bright, and my table-fare suited to my appetite, and I will be satisfied."

"And you?" put in his friend. "What do you give her in return?"

"She has my protection and bears my honored name. I keep a roof over her head, and give her a living that, if it be not luxurious, is at least comfortable."

As Sir Julien spoke I heard the clink of coin, and, peering through the crack of the door, saw that he had laid his purse on the table beside him.

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"You have no children, Julien?"

"You are right, Rokeby; I have no children, and I do not regret it."

"And yet a little son or daughter would be a comfort in old age, I should think. For some reason Heaven denied me such a blessing," answered Lord Rokeby, with another sigh.

"And why should I regret their lack? A boy would weary me with his foolish scrapes and braggadocio, while the girl— Damme, I have no mind to have a little wench around me snivelling over a dead puppy or teasing for a new dancing-dress. Devil take me if I could stand that. As it is, we live happily enough. My days are spent in scientific research and experiment."

"And how does Lady Clare pass hers?"

"I do not know, I am sure. She has a kitten, sewing, books to study. What more can she ask?"

"I had always thought to love and to be loved in return necessary to a woman's happiness."

At this there came another sneering cackle from the old baronet.

"Egad," he chuckled. "I believe you, too, are a romancer at heart. When will you take to tale-telling?"

Lord Rokeby laughed pleasantly, and helped himself to another glass of wine.

"Who knows?" he said. "The future has many strange things in store for us."

Dear old gentleman! As he sat there contentedly

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sipping his claret, he little thought what was to occur that very night.

"You forget, man, that I am no longer young. I am quite content with things as they are. Sheer gratitude should make Clare happy." As he spoke, Sir Julien rose to his feet. "Come," said he, "let's be off to sleep. It is nearly dawn, my lord."

In response to Lord Roakeby's knock, I entered the room with candles, and escorted the two old gentlemen to their chambers; and then, returning, stepped to the door to make it fast for the night, when I heard a tremendous clatter of hoofs coming nearer on the road. Thinking that it must be Weatherby, I opened the door and looked out. I was not mistaken, for as I stood there the captain, his friend, and a lady came galloping down the highway. In a moment they would have passed, but as I watched I saw the captain reel in his saddle, clutch wildly at the air, and then fall backward from the horse to the frozen road. Hurrying to his side, I found the poor gentleman quite stunned by his fall; and as his friends rode back with the horse, which the sad-mannered young man had captured, the hostler and I picked him up between us and carried him into the Grenville Arms. We were quickly followed by Captain Carleycroft and the young lady, who now wore a black riding-mask to hide her face, for which there was good reason, as was soon to be seen.

CHAPTER III

LORRIMER WEATHERBY TELLS OF THE FIRST AND LAST MEETING OF SIR JULIEN GRENVILLE AND GABRIEL CARLEYCROFT

I MUST have remained unconscious several minutes after my tumble on the hard road, for when I recovered my senses I found Carleycroft bending over me. I lay on a bench in front of the inn-fire. My first impulse was to laugh, as I thought of the ridiculous accident which had befallen me. The idea that I, who had ridden bareback at seven, should drop over and off a horse's tail like a sack of meal was ludicrous in the extreme. My second thought, and one which I immediately acted on, was to swear at the ugly throbbing going on in my head, for it seemed as though my jouncing had turned it into a hive full of bumble-bees.

"Hush your profane tongue," said Carleycroft, sternly. "My wife is here."

"A thousand pardons," I stammered, ruefully. "My broken head has sent my manners after the wine, which deserted me once it had me in an evil way. May I be a Puritan if I am not as sober as a circuit judge."

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My lady laughed, but I could see that her husband had some little doubt as to the truth of my statement, so I rose to my feet. To my astonishment there at once began again such a buzzing and making of circles in my noddle that I was glad to sink back on the bench and sit still.

"As I thought," said Carleycroft. "You need a few minutes to recover from your fall."

Then, while I muttered an apology, he said, in a kinder tone:

"After all, it matters little, Lorrimer. I'll bid the hostler keep our horses in readiness, and when your head is clear we will start again. I leave Clare in your charge."

He turned to go, but with a sudden gesture, almost of fear, the girl held him back.

"Come, come, Clare," I heard him whisper. "Why are you so frightened? Surely with two such cavaliers there is little to dread?"

I did not hear her answer, for she spoke in a low tone, but he took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly before opening the door. Then he stepped out and closed it behind him. Mistress Carleycroft—for so I had called her from the first—came towards the fire and stood near me warming her hands. In my day it has been my good-fortune to see many beautiful women, both of high and low degree, but never one to equal the little lady who was smiling at me as I sat disconsolately on the bench, my aching head clutched in my hands. She was an aristocrat, every inch of her. Her head was held high, and

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she carried herself proudly enough, yet there was none of the ostentatious severity which so many women mistake for dignity and breeding, and from the moment I raised her mittened fingers to my lips in the shadow of the park gate I was her devoted servant.

A purse lying on the table caught her eye, and she picked it up with an exclamation of terror and surprise, as though she recognized it. Then suddenly a door opened from a stairway leading to the rooms above, and an old gentleman entered. Quick as a flash the little lady clapped her riding-mask over her face as the new-comer came forward with a courtly bow.

"Your pardon, good sir and madam, but by accident I left my purse on the table. Ah, the lady has found it."

Mistress Carleycroft held it out to him, but did not lower her mask or turn in his direction, and this, even then, struck me as strange for one who had seemed so gracious. He took it from her dainty hand with a bow of stately courtesy, but, as he did so, his eye fell upon a seal ring she wore on her second finger.

"That ring!" he gasped. "Where did you get that ring?"

Now was my time to move. Such impertinent curiosity surely merited a stern rebuke, and I felt in the mood to administer it. So, springing to my feet, I stepped in front of the old man and waved him back.

"What right have you to ask?" I demanded.

With a quickness I would not have believed him capable of, he evaded me and tore the mask from the girl's face, with an ejaculation of astonishment and rage.

"Clare! What are you doing here?"

His eyes were blazing with wrath, and his face, convulsed with passion, for a moment almost frightened me, old campaigner that I was. She shrank terrified behind me, as though seeking protection.

"Damnation!" he cried. "Then since you cannot speak, I'll answer for you, madam. You are eloping, and this gay spark is your paramour. Since he is so brave a gallant, he shall have a chance to fight for you"; and as he spoke he struck me a stinging slap in the face with his hand.

"Your life for that blow!" I cried, flashing out my sword.

"Or yours for my dishonor," he answered, bravely enough, drawing in his turn.

I heard a scream, but there was no time now to waste on politeness, and I knew Mistress Kit would keep the lady safely out of the way, so I threw off my jacket and stood on guard. Suddenly the girl was at the door trying to wrench it open with trembling hands, but before she could stir it her father, as I now supposed him, seized her by the arm and flung her back.

"No, madam," he hissed, "you shall stay and see your handiwork."

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"No, no," she begged. "Let me go. In pity's name, Sir Julien!"

She knelt before him, but he shook off her grasp with a sneering laugh, and she fell to the floor as another gentleman entered from the stairway.

"What is wrong?" asked the new-comer, in bewilderment.

"Wrong?" cried Sir Julien, bolting the door. "A mere nothing, Rokeby. I found Clare eloping, and seek a settlement with her lover now."

"Two of them," said I to Mistress Killigrew. "Well, so much the better. It may be a pretty fight, after all."

I had been greatly mystified by the whole affair up to this point, but now this much was clear. Sir Julien, the father of Gabriel's wife, was a very ugly old man, who imagined that I had been honored with his daughter's affection. That he should resent it under the circumstances did not surprise me at all. What puzzled me was whether I had best kill him or not, but before I could decide the matter he had stripped for the fight and was waiting for me.

"To the death, Master Lover," he said, grimly. Since that was his choice I decided he should not be disappointed, so we fell to work in a lively fashion. Having taken my opponent's measure, I was about to end the affair by killing him in the neatest possible manner, when at the door, which he had bolted, arose the most horrible racket imaginable. Carleycroft had returned from the stable, and, hearing the rattle and clink of steel, was endeavoring

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to force an entrance, at the same time shouting for me to admit him. Another moment and he had burst in the door, for it was a rickety affair at best; and just as I was about to drive my blade through Sir Julien's heart, he struck up my sword.

"What devil's work is this?" he cried, bounding between us.

I seized him by the arm and dragged him to one side.

"'Tis Sir Julien Grenville, dropped down from Heaven knows where," I whispered. "Why did you interfere? Another pass and I would have done for him."

By this time Sir Julien had recovered the breath of which he had been temporarily deprived by my vigorous onslaught.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded, angrily, of Carleycroft.

Gabriel faced him calmly, his coolness thrown into marked contrast by the other's furious demeanor, while the girl, seemingly petrified by fright, stood watching, with her great eyes strained and staring.

"I am Gabriel Carleycroft, Captain of Essex's Horse, and your very humble servant, Sir Julien."

"I might have known you for a canting Roundhead."

"The quarrel, if quarrel there be, lies between you and me, sir. It is I who induced Lady Clare to leave Grenville Hall."

"Indeed?" sneered the old Cavalier. "It was to

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your friend I gave the credit for this affair. 'Fore God, he'd do more honor to the wanton's taste than a sour-faced hypocrite like you!"

"I told her of my love, and begged her to fly with me from your tyranny," said Carleycroft, sternly. "She has trusted her life and happiness in my keeping, and even you, sir, shall not take her from me now."

Sir Julien ground his teeth in rage at being thus boldly defied.

"You dirty whelp of a base-born mother!" he hissed, "if I do not, 'twill be because Satan has won the ruling of the world."

Though Carleycroft turned pale beneath the old man's insult, his voice was as calm as before when he spoke.

"You may bemoan your folly when it is too late," said he.

"Your meaning, sir?"

"If by chance you should kill me to gratify your spite and rage, Sir Julien, you will not only rob your daughter of her husband, but make fatherless her child."

Sir Julien gave an exclamation of surprise that was echoed by his friend.

"My *daughter*?" he cried. "Man, are you mad? Damn you! it is not to punish the theft of a daughter's heart that I would force you to fight. In killing you I avenge the dishonor of *my wife*—Clare, *Lady Grenville*!"

The murder was out at last. One glance at the

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woman who was cowering before the fire convinced me that Sir Julien had spoken truly, for if ever a face revealed guilt it was hers. But it so chanced that Carleycroft, in facing the infuriated old philosopher, had turned his back upon the woman whom he thought to be his wife, and so strong were his love and confidence that he did not for a moment doubt that Sir Julien had lied. There was a pause, then a smile crept over my poor friend's lips, and he laughed aloud.

"Your *wife*?" he said, softly. "Oh, sir, what foolish jest is this? Your wife?" and he laughed again. "Come, come, Sir Julien, this is no time for joking. Fight me if you insist, or, better by far, like an honest gentleman and loving father, give us your forgiveness, and with your blessing end the romance happily. Clare, why are you so frightened? He is not really angry with you, sweetheart, or he would not make merry over our adventure."

As Carleycroft spoke he held out his hand to her, and, turning, saw her face for the first time since the quarrel began.

"What is wrong?" he demanded, in sudden alarm; then to Sir Julien he said, hoarsely, "Speak to her, sir. You have frightened her with your anger, and she fears to answer me."

The old baronet in reply motioned fiercely towards Lady Clare, and Carleycroft turned to her again.

"My darling," he whispered, "deny Sir Julien's words. Tell him that he has spoken falsely."

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She made no answer, except to break into a faint sobbing. Then he sprang forward with a face like death, and seized me by the arm.

"Weatherby!" he cried, "my friend—my brother! What does it mean? Tell me. Am I mad, or is he?"

I tried to answer, but for a moment I could not speak. His despair and horror dumbed my tongue, and not one word did I utter in response. With an exclamation he flung me back against the wall, and in one stride reached Sir Julien. He seized him by the throat, and forced him to his knees, his voice sinking almost to a groan.

"It's a lie! It's a lie! Tell me it is untrue, you hound, or I'll choke the falsehoods from your lips!"

As the girl rushed forward he hurled Sir Julien to the floor, and, wild with fury, towered above him. God knows what injury he would have done the old man in his madness, but the girl ran between them, and as she faced my friend I dragged the half-strangled baronet out of the way.

"Spare him," she sobbed. "He has spoken only the truth. *I am his wife.*"

Even now Carleycroft refused to believe it, so much had he loved and trusted her.

"No, no!" he pleaded. "It is not so. Clare, sweetheart, if there is aught of love or pity in your heart, cease to torture me. If his words are true, it means that I have wronged him beyond all reparation. It means unutterable shame for you, and

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dishonor for us all. In God's name, speak! Deny his words. Deny them before I learn to hate you!"

"I shall not lie again," the girl answered. "Heaven forgive me! it is as he has said."

Carleycroft raised his arm, and if I had not seized him I believe he would have killed her, for she made no move to avoid him, and he that moment was not sane. Suddenly his fury left him, for he could no longer doubt the truth.

"My God!" he moaned, "what have I done? What have I done?" and fell forward on the table and lay there, his face buried in his arms.

CHAPTER IV

A DUEL AT DAYBREAK

MANY a time in the long years that have elapsed since then have I tried to imagine what thoughts would pass through my brain if I saw wife of mine sobbing and begging forgiveness at the feet of another man. For one who loved and trusted I feel sure hell could hold no greater torment; and even in the case of Sir Julien, where selfishness and pride had usurped the place of a tenderer passion, the shame and humiliation must have been maddening. Fierce old fellow that he was, I cannot but think that he acted with as much gentleness and forbearance as I could have done had I been in his plight. He did not lay hand upon her, and this was well for all concerned; for I could not have tolerated that, even in those moments of tribulation, which she alone had brought about. Instead, he stood with a sneer on his stern old face, listening to the girl as she knelt beside the man she had cheated; for, in spite of Sir Julien's severe nature, he saw, even as did Lord Rokeby and I, that it was Carleycroft who had suffered the greater wrong.

"It was for love of you," Clàre whispered—"for

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love of you, Gabriel. Am I to blame that I loved you so well?"

Carleycroft gave no heed to her words. Wretched gentleman! Through no fault of his own he found himself branded with dishonor. With naught but purest love in his heart, through the desperate doings of a passion-stricken woman, he was robbed of all that he had held most dear. For one who cherished his good name above all other things, to have this disgrace thrust upon him beyond any denying was heart-breaking. It was even more, as the years that followed show but too plainly. It was *ruin*. That moonlit winter's night saw the death of Gabriel Carleycroft and the birth of another far different creature to whom the name and body of the former fell; for if ever soul was wrenched forth and life left behind, it was this man who suffered it.

"So you fooled your lover as you did me?" said Sir Julien, with almost the sound of a laugh in his hoarse voice. "I wish you joy of this day, Lady Grenville. It was for this, then, that I took you from your beggary. 'Fore Heaven, madam, you have repaid me well."

At this she rose to her feet, and her eyes blazed through her tears as she answered him:

"For this night's doings thank yourself, Sir Julien," she said, giving him back look for look.

"How so, madam? You had naught before you but service or the streets of London. I took you from want and misery. I made a fine lady of you in spite of your poverty and lack of manners. I gave

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you food to eat, clothes to dress you, and placed a roof between you and the sky. All that you could ask of a husband I gave to you, and this is my reward."

"You lie," she said, in a whisper.

"What, madam?" he cried, starting back. "You dare—"

"When you came to me in my hour of need in London and asked me to marry you, I was more grateful than I can ever tell. I half loved you then, and, had it been your will, all that was in my heart to give would have been yours; but you would not have it so. You sought a wife, you told me, but it was untrue. You wished for a woman to be the servant of your whims—a nurse, such as you could hire for a few shillings in any town—a toy to gratify and amuse you. Is this wifehood? Then God pity all women who seek for happiness where Heaven bids them! Pity and forgive them, for, like me, they will believe that they have been forgotten!"

I sprang to her side and caught her in my arms as she fell backward, white and lifeless. For a moment I thought her dead, and, as I carried her to Mistress Killigrew, with all my soul I prayed that it might be so. I saw the tears in good Kitty's eyes as she took the poor lady from me.

"Dear heart," she whispered—"dear heart, your load has been too heavy."

Carleycroft rose from his chair, with a face cold and stern, though it bore plainly the marks of his recent agony.

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"Sir Julien," he said, gravely, "it is for you to speak. I am at your service."

Sir Julien bowed coldly.

"Sir," said he, "though my undoing is not your deliberate crime, it remains our common misfortune. As you yourself must see, after this night's work the whole world is not wide enough for both of us. You will fight me?"

"It shall be as you wish," Carleycroft answered. "Choose your weapons, Sir Julien."

"Ah! It is a man, after all, in spite of Round-head breeding! I choose pistols, young sir. My arm is too old for sword play, as your friend has shown me."

I kissed my hand to Sir Julien. Why had I not run him through before the door gave way? All that followed might thus have been avoided, for Gabriel would not have discovered the real state of affairs until weeks afterwards. If I had been a mere thruster instead of a man to whom sword-play was a science, the old Cavalier would be dead now, not loading a pistol with which to work murder on my friend. I heaved a sigh when I thought of the chance I had let go by me, but it was too late for aught but regret now.

"Stop!" said Lord Rokeby. "We have but one pistol."

It was quite true, as we found on investigation. Carleycroft and I were armed with our rapiers, while the other two had only a sword and pistol between them.

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"Damnation!" cried Sir Julien. Then, as a thought occurred to him, he went on hurriedly, "I have an idea, Captain. I will toss a crown with you to see which of us fires at the other. It is fair for both of us."

"I agree," said Carleycroft, calmly.

"I protest," exclaimed Lord Rokeby. "This can but end in murder."

Sir Julien waved him back fiercely.

"Your friend, Captain, shall toss the coin."

"His friend will see you damned first," said I. "When I fight it is like a man, not a dice-thrower."

Sir Julien hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"Shall I?" he asked, finally. Carleycroft smiled gravely, and nodded in reply.

"I am sure no one could do it better," he said.

"But," sneered the baronet, "will you abide by its decision?"

To my surprise and delight, Carleycroft slapped his glove on Sir Julien's face as bravely and smartly as any swashbuckler of Prince Rupert could have done.

"You have my answer," said he.

"Expect no pity," hissed Sir Julien, as Lord Rokeby and I held him back, for he would have sprung at Carleycroft's throat like the old wolf that he was.

"You jest again, sir," answered Carleycroft, with another bitter smile. "Come, we are losing time."

Sir Julien held the coin in his hand for a moment before throwing it in the air, and as it lay on his open

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palm it caught a beam of light from the fire and sent it sparkling across the room.

"Have you a choice?" he demanded.

Carleycroft shook his head. Judging from his demeanor, one would have thought the affair interested him but little.

"Then," said Sir Julien, "I call the crown."

As he spoke he tossed it almost to the ceiling, and it fell with a clink and rattle on the floor. I turned towards Carleycroft and found he had not even looked in the direction of the coin, but was calmly staring into the fire.

"You have won," I said to him.

Sir Julien swore savagely at his ill-luck, and, seizing a wine-bottle, poured himself a gobletful.

"The fortune of war," he observed, calmly. "Whenever you are ready, Captain."

"Now, Gabriel," I whispered, joyfully, "kill the old game-cock, and let's get on our way to London."

"Have I not sinned enough?" he answered, without raising his head.

"Don't look at the fire, man," I said, angrily. "It will dim your sight, and we want no misses now;" but he paid no heed to my words.

"Shall I rob him of his life as I have taken his wife from him?" I heard him murmur.

"Yes," said I. "Damn him! He don't deserve to live. Here is the pistol, lad. Let us have it over with before your wife revives."

Carleycroft started as though the word stung him.

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"You are right," he said, softly. "*Before she revives.*"

"Look," I whispered, and I made him turn to where the poor lady, still unconscious, lay on the bench as though dead. "There is the prize you are fighting for, lad. Remember how she loves you."

He went over and stood beside her, looking down at her pale, tear-stained face, framed with added beauty by the dark masses of her hair that had come tumbling down to serve as pillow for her head. Sir Julien and Lord Rokeby were standing together across the room, staring at him as he lingered beside her.

"No, no," he muttered. "What hope can there be for happiness? She is better without me. It is Heaven's will that we part."

Sir Julien stepped forward with an oath.

"We are waiting for you," he growled. "You will have a lifetime for her. Give me my moment now."

Carleycroft turned towards him as he spoke.

"I ask your pardon," he said. Then he knelt beside Lady Grenville and kissed her reverently on the forehead as though in farewell, while poor Kitty sobbed in her apron at the sight of his face. Sir Julien flushed angrily.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" he asked, as Carleycroft came forward. "I have no fear of death. No regret save that I cannot kill you for your blow."

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Carleycroft smiled and took the pistol from the table on which it was lying.

"At times Providence is wonderfully considerate of our wishes," he said. "Take the pistol, sir. I waive my right to it."

"What are you doing?" I cried.

"Hush, Lorrimer," he whispered. "It is not fit that the betrayer of Lady Grenville should live."

Rokeby seized Sir Julien's arm as he took the weapon from Carleycroft's hand.

"You will not kill him?" said he. But Sir Julien gave a snarl of triumph and wrenched himself loose.

"'S'death!" he hissed. "May my soul burn in hell if I do not. He has dared to give me back the life his love has dishonored, and he shall pay for it."

As Sir Julien spoke he walked across the room, and, turning, stood with his back against the wall.

"Are you ready?" he asked, with a savage smile on his grim old face.

"In pity's name, Gabriel!" I began.

"If you are friend of mine, do not interfere," said Carleycroft, sternly. "It is this or suicide," Then, taking his stand opposite to Sir Julien, he folded his arms and drew himself up to his full height. "I am ready," he said, gently.

Sir Julien raised the pistol and aimed it with deliberate hand. The fire-light flashed on Carleycroft's face, turning his cheeks ruddy and his yellow hair to orange gold. He was smiling as he stood

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there facing death without a fear or tremor. I turned my head in grief and despair, and as I did so a lithe form flitted by me. There was a shot and a cry of joy. Lady Grenville had revived and knocked the pistol from Sir Julien's hand as he pulled the trigger. The bullet broke a pane of glass in one of the windows, and, as her husband struck the girl to his feet with a savage blow, Carleycroft sprang forward to protect her.

There was a struggle; then, as Sir Julien stabbed him in the side with a dagger, my poor friend gave a low cry, and, staggering to the window, clutched the curtain, which gave way, letting him slowly to the floor. He lay there motionless; the beams of the rising sun blazing through the glass gilded his face with a heavenly radiance, and, as we looked, Lady Grenville crept slowly to his side from where she had fallen.

She dropped her head on his breast with a little sigh, and they lay there together as though dead in the light of the new day.

Book Two
SIR HILLARY OF THE GRENVILLES

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH LORRIMER WEATHERBY HOLDS CONVERSE
WITH ONE CAPTAIN FORTESCUE

TWENTY-FOUR years after the tragedy at the Grenville Arms I rode down from London, where I had been visiting for a fortnight, to the old manor-house, now the abiding-place of as arrant a young limb of the devil as ever imposed on the patience of a tolerably law-abiding and not entirely unintelligent community. That there may be no chance of mistaking the person thus alluded to, I will state at once that I refer to my former ward, young Sir Hillary Grenville. This bundle of airs and impudence having completed his twenty-third year on the day I arrived from London, my journey being undertaken for the purpose of assisting in celebrating the happy event, gave a party to a number of his friends in the neighborhood. As the afternoon waned I grew weary of the general silliness so apt to be prevalent where there are present a number of matrimonially inclined females of various and uncertain ages, and, quietly withdrawing myself from the party, went for a stroll about the grounds. Emerging by a little wicket-gate in an obscure corner

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of the high stone wall which surrounded the park, I found that a squad of troopers doing infantry duty in an unsuccessful search for a deserter had paused for rest, and were sprawling about on the grass, while their captain, a pot-bellied, near-sighted fellow named Fortescue, sought comfort from an evil-smelling pipe.

"Gad!" said I. "Captain, surely you have invented a substitute for tobacco or my nose deceives me?"

He blinked with uncertain eyes for a moment before he recognized me.

"On the contrary," he answered, merrily enough, "it is merely your lack of experience with a very superior quality that occasions your show of ignorance. Why, down at the smithy—"

"Oh," said I, "is this what Jenkins does with his hoof-parings? Truly he is a clever man to sell them to you for pipe usage. Now as a change from the fumes of a pitch-pot that particular invention of yours may be a great success, but otherwise I must withhold my approval."

"Oh, there are folks in worse odor—" began Fortescue.

"Doubtless," I interrupted, "but whom? Why, I haven't a ham in the larder that I would leave willingly in your neighborhood."

"You have a pretty wit, sir," said the captain.

"And you have scents, sir," I answered, "though of a doubtful quality."

"How so?" quoth he. "I suspect a pun, but may I be boiled in oil if I see it."

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"Why," said I, "there be various scents—the skunk, the musk deer, the bristles you are smoking—"

"And nonsense, such as you are giving voice to now," he answered, immensely pleased with what he considered his extremely witty retort, quite failing to see that it was but my joke served up with a different sauce.

"You spoke of bad odor, Captain?"

"I refer to your ward—"

"Ward me no wards!" I exclaimed. "It is two years since Hillary passed from my guardianship."

"They say he has somewhat bettered his behavior since he came of age," remarked the captain, puffing vigorously on his pipe.

"Then they lie," I answered, hotly. "Since he took to consorting with army men he has been on his way to the devil hot-footed. When I controlled him—"

"When was that, pray?" he asked. "Rumor has it that it was from his guardian he learned much of his mischievousness; furthermore, that he has led one Captain Weatherby by the nose from his first day in breeches up to the present."

This was too much to be borne.

"Captain Fortescue," said I, "the twelve disciples would have found their hands full in managing that same youth if he were given the start in wilfulness and deviltry that the easiness of his first guardian, Lord Rokeby, afforded him. And if I have been

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concerned in any of his wild doings, it was merely to be near him that I might exert a restraining influence upon him in the midst of his mischief."

"Well argued," replied the fat captain. "Doubtless that explains why you were found asleep in Doctor Gantry's hay-stack with the knocker of Cobbler Blunt's establishment fast clasped in your hand, to say nothing of a certain young baronet, who was discovered in an addled condition on the front door-step of the Reverend Jackson Peabody's parsonage on a Sunday morning, with a bottle in every pocket, and the Lord only knows how many under the waist-band."

"Probably he had been calling on the minister," retorted I; "while, so far as I am concerned, the doctor himself had recommended a night in the dew as a sure specific for a slight attack of barber's-itch."

"Gammon!" said the captain. "You are a couple of the same kind, you and your precious ward. May I be spitted on a darning-needle if it is not so."

The captain prided himself on the originality of his expletives, and, furthermore, frequently stated that he never repeated himself; but of the truth of this last assertion I have some doubt. I scorned to continue the argument with one who was so evidently bound to misconstrue the simplest happening as proof of his absurd statements, so, helping myself to a succulent grass-stalk, I started chewing its white end, and squatted down on the soft turf beside him.

"What is new in the way of law-breaking?" I asked, though I was well aware that the person usual-

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ly least informed in regard to crime is the officer commanding the troops that make up the country patrol.

"There is a highwayman prowling in the neighborhood o' nights," replied Fortescue, blowing an arrow of smoke through a ring of like composition, a trick of which he was inordinately proud.

This was news indeed. The presence of an illegal collector of toll would add a pleasing excitement to night riding on the turnpike. Sir Hillary would be delighted, I knew.

"Humph!" said I. "Then I will give you a word of advice, Captain. You had best get your men and yourself home before sundown or you may be robbed of your uniforms, which, I take it, are the only things of value that the lot of you possess."

Fortescue sucked contemptuously on his ash-filled pipe.

"Can't you see it is out, man?" said I; "but if you are short of parings, there is a tannery not so far off but you can reach it and have a really Christian smoke before daybreak."

"If you were not so old a man," he answered, meditatively, "I would cut off your mustache and smoke that, if only to show that there be worse weeds grown than this tobacco."

I looked at him in surprise, for while no longer in the first flush of manhood, I hold any man under sixty to be little more than a full-grown lad, and I had yet some years to live before I reached that age.

"I am not so fond of your lieutenant that I shall

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push his promotion on him with my sword-point," I retorted; "but if you are really anxious for excitement, I'll wager my mustache against the moss shamming your upper lip, together with that piteous apology for a beard that you wear on your chin. I have the dice in my pocket, and I'll throw you a main, the loser to help himself to a shave before breakfast-time."

Fortescue considered awhile before he made answer.

"No; may I be stewed in Malmsey if I do. Lucky in love and unlucky at cards or dice, the saying goes; and if that be so, you must be a master-hand at the throw."

"How is that?" I asked, having scarcely followed him.

"Since you are unmarried you must have been unlucky in love—"

"That's not how I look at it," said I, with a chuckle.

"Pish!" said Fortescue; "there are sour grapes in matrimony as well as elsewhere; besides, it is the widowers, not the bachelors, who are really fortunate."

I decided to leave him uninformed of his mistake, for, if I do say it myself, I have been in my time mightily run after by the petticoats.

"How do you know there is a cut-purse in the neighborhood?" I said, returning to the subject.

"He robbed Sir Humphrey Berkely on the way to a merry-making last night."

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"Is it so? The fellow is a guest here to-day, but said nothing of the adventure; though, now I think it over, it is not a thing to be proud of, I admit."

The captain filled up his pipe and lighted it in spite of my protests.

"What manner of rascal is this highwayman, Captain?" I asked.

"He is tall and slender and biggish at the shoulders. Marvellously like your ward in appearance, according to Sir Humphrey."

"Oh," said I, with a whistle, "do you suspect Hillary of the deed?"

"I hardly know Sir Hillary, for I have laid eyes on him only once or twice, but he is great on larks," puffed the captain, "and not disinclined to fun-making at his cousin's expense, if what I have heard is true."

For all I knew at that moment it might have been the lad out for a racket. When a boy of twelve he was fond of playing the game, though he usually insisted on murdering as well, and generally made me act the part of hangman when he was led to execution among the apple-trees in the park orchard.

"I will speak to him," I answered.

"Do," said the captain. "Larks are larks, but the law isn't."

"That is a matter of opinion," said I. "Did you hear of what happened to the Bishop of Burling on Hampstead Heath a fortnight ago?"

"Not I," he answered, with a sigh of lazy enjoyment. "What occurred to his Reverence?"

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"Jack Midnight took up a collection for the benefit of the heathen, and wound up the performance by forcing the bishop to dance 'Cover the Buckle' in mud up to his shoe-tops."

"I wish that rascal would turn up in this neighborhood," said the captain, rousing from his lethargy. "If I wouldn't nab him and use his carcass for a rope-stretcher inside of a fortnight, may I be pickled in brimstone."

"They have made the Heath too warm for him," I observed, helping myself to another grass-stalk. "He sent a note to the bishop inquiring after his health, and announcing that, owing to the uncivil curiosity of the local authorities, he would be forced to shift his headquarters to another vicinity for the time being, though he hoped to be able to eat his next Christmas dinner with his Reverence."

"So he has sought a new field for his labors?"

"Perhaps he is the gentleman who attended to Humphrey last night," I suggested, hopefully.

"No," said the captain, decisively.

"How do you know, lunkhead?" I snorted, exasperated at his confident manner.

"It's larks, and I know no man in the neighborhood who is the size of your ward," he said, obstinately.

"You ass!" I remarked, in disgust. "Strangers sometimes pass this way."

"Besides, there is no such luck as the coming of the most famous highwayman in England to this hole of a shire," went on the captain.

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He squinted at the sun for a moment, then arose and carefully laid his pipe away in his pocket.

"Time we were moving," he observed, as though reluctant to leave the shade. "Fall in! By twos—right wheel—march!"

As his men moved off along the road, in charge of a sergeant, Fortescue paused and said,

"Tell Sir Hillary larks are larks, but the law isn't."

"Go to the devil!" I growled. "Hark! What is that?"

"Singing," said the captain, in a pitying tone.

"A noise perhaps, *but not singing*," I corrected.

At this moment the would-be minstrel, whose unmelodious tones had announced his coming, staggered around the bend in the road, escaping a collision with the soldiers by a hair's-breadth. After pausing, with the assistance of a large mullein stalk, for a brief interval on the grass by the road-side, he came zigzagging down the highway and ran full tilt against Captain Fortescue, sending that worthy gentleman reeling back, to trip over a stone and fall flat on the turf, with his head in a cluster of wild blackberry vines.

CHAPTER VI

LORRIMER WEATHERBY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

THE new-comer seemed greatly surprised at the collision, and, in a lesser degree, at the undignified struggles of the captain, who was swearing volubly as he endeavored with but little success to free his long hair from the clutching briars. The cause of Fortescue's downfall stood looking down at the fat soldier, swaying in the fumes of the liquor he had drunk as the top of a pine swings in a freshening breeze. He was a tremendous big fellow, with an unusual breadth of shoulders, which I had thrust upon my observation, for he stood with his back towards me as he regarded the captain with intoxicated gravity.

"Drunken rascal!" he remarked, thickly. "D'ye need the whole highway that you must run into a wayfarer so roughly? Get up and abandon this shocking intemperance in your future years, I b'seech you."

"Devil take you!" snarled Fortescue, still struggling with the briars.

"No doubt he will," returned the intoxicated stranger, laughing. "And it will not be the first time we have met, either."

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The captain rose to his feet in a towering rage, with numerous thorns and bits of grass clinging to his locks.

"You drunken lout!" he cried, angrily, shaking his fist at the cause of his tumble.

"Lout yourself, and knave and villain, too," interrupted the tipsy man, with a hiccough, not a whit abashed.

"What?" sputtered Fortescue, scarlet with rage. "You speak thus to one wearing the King's cloth?"

"You are drunk, Captain. At your age, too! Shame, Captain; I blush for you."

As is usual in such instances, the whole world had indulged in intoxicating liquors, and the tall man was the only really sober individual in the neighborhood.

"You tipsy cur," stormed Fortescue, "I have half a mind—"

"Then why conceal it, Captain? Half a mind is better than none at all, and more than any one should expect of a military man," retorted the other.

"I'll crop your ears for you," cried the captain, furious at being thus bearded.

"And for pattern use your own, no doubt," returned the stranger, politely. "When were they clipped, Captain? and is that why you wear your hair so long?"

"You lie!" fairly yelled the irate officer, drawing his sword.

"Stay, Fortescue," I interposed. "Remember the man is drunk, and in his present condition no

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match for you. Come, take no anger at what he says."

"But," he protested. "I—"

"Satisfaction is to be had for the asking," said the intoxicated giant, with a sweeping bow, that nearly upset him in his turn. "Captain, flushed with liquor as I am, I'll best you at sword-play, or beg your pardon for your running into me in so unmanly a fashion. Can a gentleman ask more?"

"This is past endurance," said Fortescue, pushing me out of the way with no gentle arm. "I will try your skill, sir, but I warn you that you will regret it."

"Good!" cried the stranger. "Your Royal Fatness shall be judge."

Turning towards me as he spoke, he slapped me on the shoulder, and I caught my first glimpse of his face.

"Good God!" I muttered, for the moment aghast.

"What, man," he laughed, "have you seen a ghost?"

Before I could answer they were hard at it with thrust and parry, but in a twinkling the drunken fellow whipped his sword around the blade of Fortescue, at the same time thrusting viciously. There was a ring of steel, a cry from the captain, and something flashed high in the air with a sort of humming vibration. Like a lump of lead it descended, to be caught gracefully by the intoxicated fencer; and as he stood there he held a sword in each hand, while Fortescue, disarmed and powerless, was clutching his wrist in

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agony. I recognized the trick in an instant, for twenty-six years before Pietro Carcarni, the Italian master of fencing, and I together had invented it, after months of patient study. The stranger had obtained his signal victory by skilful use of the slyest thrust in the whole art of sword-play, the Dart of Sicily, *and now I knew him beyond all doubt.*

"Ha!" he cried, striking an attitude and leaning on his sword. "I always keep my word."

As he spoke, he staggered forward, and, tripping over his rapier, which in some way caught between his feet, would have fallen had I not seized him by the arm and restored his balance.

"Thank you," he said, with a politeness that was somewhat marred by a hiccough that would not be denied. "How now, Captain?"

"Curse you!" began Fortescue; but, as his better nature prevailed, he bit his lip in silent chagrin over his defeat.

"Eh?" said his victorious antagonist. "What say you, sir?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the captain. "You have beaten me and sprained my wrist in the bargain. I am man enough to acknowledge my defeat, and at the hands of such a swordsman I hold it in no dishonor."

As he spoke he bowed as elegantly as was possible for so fat a person.

"Bravo!" said I, pleased that he took it so well.

"I have been honored, sir, by crossing blades with you," returned the giant, in a mollified tone, offering

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the captain his sword with a grace that was remarkable considering the man's condition.

Fortescue took his weapon and thrust it in his belt.

"My men are well on their way back to the barracks, so I must not lag behind," he said. "Good-evening to you, good sirs;" and again muttering his admiration for the other's extraordinary skill, the honest captain hastened up the road and around the bend in pursuit of his soldiers, leaving me face to face with his late antagonist. That worthy took immediate offence at my startled gaze, and, drawing himself up to his full height, demanded with drunken dignity if I found aught to disapprove of in his appearance.

"Gabriel," I said, gently, "do you not know me?"

"*Sacré!*" he cried, with a sudden backward step. "That name! Who are you, monsieur, that are possessed of so much knowledge? Speak, sir; and if you have no good excuse for dragging back such a memory I will undertake to prevent the repetition of the offence."

He drew his sword as he threatened me, and stood there in the sunlight, a savage scowl on his wine-flushed face.

"Look at me, man," I answered, quietly. "If in a moment's time you do not recall me to mind, my name shall be forthcoming, I promise you."

For a second or two he peered at me as though in a rare puzzle, then the light of recognition flashed over his stern features.

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"Weatherby, or I'm damned," he cried. "Why, it is over twenty years since we parted, Lorrimer."

"More like twenty-four, Gabriel," I answered, and shook him heartily by the hand. Then to my astonishment he threw back his head and roared out a deep, guttural laugh.

"Devil take me if I knew you. You have grown fat, man, and your hair is gray. And to think I should not recognize you, while you knew me at sight. Devil's blood! A jest, or I'm a Dutchman."

I stared at him in silence, for it seemed hard to believe that this wild - swearing, rum - soaked bravo could be the young Puritan of the years long passed. He caught my glance and read its meaning, for he broke out with another hoarse laugh.

"Lorrimer," he cried, with as vile an oath as I had ever heard even in the old cavalier days of strange and fantastic swearing, "there is not much of the Puritan left in me, you are thinking. Eh, lad? I know it well. I could crack my sides laughing when I remember the sober, sanctimonious psalm-singer I was in those days."

As I stood there I felt sick at heart. What villainous wreckage time had wrought with this man's nature! Even in my worst days as a rake and ruffler I had never fallen to such a state as that in which he so evidently revelled.

"Oh, damme!" he went on, with a discordant chuckle. "Don't look so like a parson. Such a reverend air ill becomes your jolly face; and, if I remember rightly, in the old times you were several

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degrees removed from a saint. You wonder what has wrought such a change? Liquor is the charm that has so mightily transformed me. I am rum's handiwork, egad. Perhaps you remember my daddy's fondness for his grog? Like father like son, my bully rook; and, though I am a drunken dog, hanged if I would exchange my kennels for a palace. I'd not climb back to the old perch of dreary respectability if I could. Not I, or may the devil fly away with me."

There was a moment's silence, for I could think of nothing save the marvellous change that time had worked in this man who had been the friend of my youthful days. He seemed a trifle embarrassed at my searching scrutiny.

"Am I greatly altered in appearance that you stare at me so?" he asked, half resentfully. "In my youth the maids called me a pretty fellow, though for years I was too great a fool to use my handsome face to my own advantage."

Before I answered him I looked him over calmly as he stood there, ankle-deep in the velvety grass and clover. His hair was grizzled and worn short, as was the fashion in the old days of Cromwell, and, now that he was fast sobering, his face was pale and lined with tiny wrinkles about the eyes and mouth, but still handsome with a lawless, sinister beauty. The blue eyes were sunken, but as bright and bold as ever. The heavy jaw seemed set with a more defiant firmness, and the strong teeth behind his grayish lips were as white and glistening as in his youth. In all

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physical change time had passed him lightly. It was with his other nature that the years had worked their havoc, for the righteous-living young Puritan had become a swaggering, law-defying bully, whose every word and action proclaimed him a desperado. Suddenly a feeling of horror at what must follow in the near future, of helpless wrath and almost indignant dread, seized me. Were all the years of my loving, hopeful labor about to be rendered fruitless by this man's presence in the vicinity? The scandal of two decades ago, that I believed long since laid forever, would be revived, for I could not doubt that this wild ruffian would be capable of almost any indiscretion, if not downright villany. How long could I keep the truth from him? A day—a week—a month perhaps, but in a little time, from his own careless observation, if not from the village gossip and tattle, he must learn enough to enable him to grasp and interpret the existing state of affairs but too correctly. Then, again, I feared the comment that his personal appearance would draw from the honest country folk making up our own tenantry, as well as those residing upon the estates of the neighboring gentry; for, as he stood there in the shadow cast by a huge oak-tree, I realized that, dissipated as his face was, its astonishing resemblance to that of my young ward, Sir Hillary Grenville, could escape no one. Though Fortescue was as blind as a bat, it seemed hardly possible that he should have so completely overlooked the existing likeness of the two men. I could only hope that his lack of familiarity with Hillary's ap-

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pearance would prevent embarrassing inquiries, for the same force and courage lay in every facial line and expression of the two. The same reckless glint sparkled in the eyes of the elder man that so often flashed from beneath the lids of the youth whose strength and beauty were my old heart's pride; and, save that the boy was a good inch the taller, they might have stood side by side in a dim light, feature for feature and limb for limb, each the image of the other.

"I thought you dead," I said, slowly.

"Not I," he chuckled. "Dead men tell no tales, and I have too many rollicking stories on my tongue to be boxed up yet a while."

Was there a tone of menace in his voice? I looked at him searchingly. Perhaps he knew my secret even now. Could it be this that had brought him back to the neighborhood? He returned my gaze frankly enough, and as I looked I found myself mentally comparing his careless attitude with a favorite pose of my ward. Then the silence, which for a moment had been undisturbed save for the chirping of a robin in a meadow beyond the highway, was broken by the sound of a cart drawing rapidly nearer on the road. As the driver of the wagon reached us he took off his hat, and I recognized him as one of the oldest of our tenants.

"God bless you, Sir Hillary," he shouted, in cheery tones as he caught sight of Carleycroft's face in the shade of the oak, and in a moment he was gone, while a cloud of dust drifted softly along the road.

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If there had existed in my mind one doubt of the wonderful resemblance that these two men bore each other, this incident would have driven it forth forever. The old farmer, who was as familiar with Hillary's appearance as I myself, though, of course, his sight was a trifle dimmed by age, had mistaken this ruffler for him, and gone on his way confident that he had encountered his young landlord on the road-side.

"The old cock thought he knew me," said Carleycroft. Then his expression changed, and for a moment I seemed to see the well-remembered face of my old friend staring at me from behind the mask that time and dissipation had woven on the countenance of the swashbuckler at my side.

"Lorrimer," he whispered, almost as though in fear, "tell me of *her*."

"You mean Lady Clare?"

"Yes," he answered, wincing at the name.

"Have you heard nothing in all these years?" I stammered.

"Nothing, man, nothing. Answer," he said, hoarsely.

"You remember that, after you were stabbed by Sir Julien, I nursed you back to life, though you forbade me to undeceive Lady Grenville as to your rumored death?" I began, reluctantly.

"Yes," he answered, "I remember. She had returned to Grenville Hall with Sir Julien, and I thought it better that she should believe me dead."

"A month later, though still weak in body, you

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left England, and from that day to this I did not hear from you."

"I did not write you," he said, gently, "because I sought to sever all the ties that bound me to the old life. A correspondence with you, dear lad, would have kept open the wound I wished to heal and forget."

I paused before I spoke again, for I feared the effect of my next words.

"Go on," he said, impatiently. "I am listening."

"A month after you left England Sir Julien died," I said, with an effort.

"What!" he cried. "*Only a month?*"

I nodded.

I pray Heaven that I may never again see upon a man's face such a look as came over that of Carleycroft. He seemed for a moment as though about to choke. He clutched at his throat with twitching fingers, then dropped his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Only a month," he whispered, as though to himself. "What deed of mine merited such a punishment?"

His voice had sunk almost to a sob, but like a flash he recovered himself, only to break out in a mocking laugh.

"A month! Only a month," he repeated; and as I listened I knew that he was gibing and scoffing at his own broken heart, for there was no merriment in his laughter.

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"Think of it, Lorrimer, and then tell me the devil has no sense of humor. If I had *known*—if I had *waited*—she would have been mine in a *month*. All these years we would have loved and grown old together. Children, wealth, contentment would have been ours."

He was raving like a madman now.

"I have been cheated of it all—*robbed* of it without mercy—without cause by the God you pious fools worship as good and great. Merciful, All-powerful Creator!" he sneered, "I curse and defy you for a monstrous creature of cruelty and evil!"

And while he blasphemed so terribly the poor tortured wretch shook his fists in impotent fury at the sky; then fell face downward on the turf by the roadside.

The robin, whose soft twitter had made known his presence in the next field, flew lazily into the willow that drooped gracefully over the park wall. In the distance I heard the merry chorus of a Maying party at the inn near by. Above us the clouds were sailing slowly before the breeze from the horizon to where the sun was already fast sinking in its downward flight. Earth seemed soft and calm in its gentle peace. The country was bright and beautiful in the glow of early summer, and yet here on the ground lay a poor human thing in a torment greater than any agony of flesh. For the second time in my life I prayed death to have mercy on a suffering being, and, divinely pitying, wrench forth the torn and broken spirit that it might find eternal rest and calm

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without further torture, and for a moment I believed it had so come to pass. Then as I bent silently over the prostrate form of Carleycroft I saw him shudder, and found that as he lay there he was sobbing wildly.

What could I do?

For a moment my treasured secret trembled on my lips, but I choked it back. Could I forget the duty I owed the son in my pity for the father? For love of the mother Gabriel Carleycroft had lost all, and it was in the hope of driving from his recollection all memory of her that he had sunk to the vile level of his present life. Would the knowledge of the existence of his son—and hers—be a source of joy or the cause of further misery? I dared not assume the responsibility of deciding. Then, again, if the possession of his lost love's child should bring a ray of happiness into such a wretched life as his, what of the boy? Had I the right to drag Hillary down from his present content—to shatter his faith in his dead mother's memory—only to bring him face to face with such a father? The life of Carleycroft had been of his own choosing, while so far Hillary had lived only in my love and care. My friend had wilfully torn himself from fellowship with me and alone fought out his sorrow to the very end of the defeat that his life had proved to be. Should the gay and happy lad have the blight of that secret shame cast upon his young heart in the first flush of his manhood? Not by deed of mine, I swore, nor of any other if I could prevent it. It was the thought of

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how the sweet lady, his dead mother, would have chosen that kept me silent. The women think ever of the children, and it was a woman who, in my mind, had the right to decide.

“Is Clare— Is she dead?”

“She did not live out the year. Poor girl, her heart broke when you were left for dead on the floor of the Grenville Arms.”

“Then all these years when I have seemed to hear her voice on the breezes sighing round the camp-fires, it *was* she whispering to me. Oh, if I had *known*!— Our child! Tell me, Lorrimer, what of our child?”

“We buried the little one with its mother.”

Heaven forgive me the lie, but I thought it for the best. Carleycroft rose to his feet slowly, and I looked curiously and wonderingly at his face. It was ashy white and set sternly in lines of grief, but his eyes were unwet; for though he had sobbed piteously as a beaten school-girl, nature had carried her cruelty so far as to deny him even tears.

“Perhaps it is as well,” he said, softly. “What a father for a child to own! A pretty parent! I, tavern bully and highwayman!”

“Highwayman?” I cried, starting back.

“Jack Midnight,” he said, with a bitter smile, removing his hat and bowing low before me—“Jack Midnight, at your pleasure, lately come from Hampstead Heath, where I found my surroundings a trifle too sultry for comfort.”

In my jest with Fortescue I had accidentally hit

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on the truth, for in the person of Sir Humphrey's despoiler the most famous cut-purse in all England stood before me. The captain had his wish. Jack Midnight was within his reach.

"Oh, it is true enough," he said. "They have gossiped of me for a year or so both in town and country. I robbed the Lord Mayor of London of his plate, and gave dancing-lessons to his Reverence the Bishop of Burling. You wonder that I, who was once so honest in every thought, can boast of law-breaking in such a tone. Twenty-four years is a long time, Lorrimer, and once well started on a hill-side the descent is over-easy. I left England and took passage to France; then when King Louis bought my sword I ruffled it as his musketeer. That was the beginning. 'Twas then the only inheritance left me by my father—his love of drink—came to my rescue and brought me all the comfort I have known since that night at the inn. I went from France and served as a foot-soldier in the Low Countries. I fought in Italy and among the Turks on the Black Sea, then hied me back to Louis to serve in his great campaigns, and now I have come home to England to gather what I can on the King's highway, where I will stagger on until, like my father, I break my neck in some merciful ditch, or choke in the mire it contains. A pretty end for a Puritan captain, as I live, or rather, as I die."

As he finished he held out his hand to me.

"Enough of boasting and regret," said he. "Your hand again, Lorrimer, and then farewell."

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"Farewell?" I murmured, in surprise.

"What else, lad?" he said, almost tenderly. "The years have torn us too far apart for fellowship. Good-bye, and if ever you think of Gabriel Carleycroft, remember the honest young captain who rode into the west so long ago, and try to forget the ghost of other times that appeared to you to-day."

He gave my hand a friendly pressure, turned before I could answer him, and, whistling shrilly on his fingers, took a stride or two towards the bend in the highway. As though in answer to his signal a great black horse came galloping around the turn, and in a moment Carleycroft had leaped on his back and vanished in a cloud of dust, riding madly in the direction from which he had come.

CHAPTER VII

LORRIMER WEATHERBY AND SIR HILLARY GRENVILLE

WHILE I myself believe that the happenings I describe in the preceding chapters must make clear all the events having any bearing on my story that took place during the four-and-twenty years which lay between the night of the encounter at the Grenville Arms and my meeting with Gabriel Carleycroft on the highway, yet, to make certain that all shall be as plain to the reader of this tale as it is to me when I recall the various incidents to my mind, I will restate them as briefly as possible.

After treacherously stabbing my friend, Sir Julien, with the assistance of Lord Rokeby, conveyed the unconscious body of his young wife to Grenville Hall, where the servants were led to believe that their mistress had been thrown from her horse on an early morning ride which she had taken in defiance of her husband's orders. Carleycroft, whom they had left for dead, survived his terrible wound and went from England, refusing my offer to accompany him on his wanderings. Sir Julien lost his life a month after my friend's departure in an explosion which

ended his most ambitious experiment, an investigation of the nature and causes of lightning, so I have heard, before he could communicate his discovery, if such he made, to the scientific world. Strange as it may seem, either through carelessly putting off the emendation to some future time or from a wish at any cost to keep the honored name of Grenville free from any public smirch of shame, the only will which the old philosopher left named as his heir the as yet unborn child of Lady Clare, appointing as its guardian his friend Lord Rokeby. This unexpected turn of affairs made simple all that had been believed would prove most difficult of adjustment. The babe was born a few months later, and though the mother survived his birth but a week, the boy grew strong and lusty until, when a fine, handsome child of six, the good-hearted old nobleman, who had cared for him so faithfully, sickened and died, having named me, to my astonishment, as his successor. While the care and education of an infant were things I had never before undertaken, I assumed charge cheerfully enough; and, in spite of the gibes of such would-be wits as Captain Fortescue, I flatter myself that my efforts were fairly successful. I taught the boy to ride and to fight with both pistol and sword, to tell good wine by the smack of it on the tongue, to judge the good points of women and horses, laying particular stress upon the latter accomplishment; and while the village parson instructed him in such doubtful branches as ciphering and penmanship, to say nothing of giving him a speaking acquaintance with

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a number of languages which he asserted to be dead, and which, to my way of thinking, richly deserved their fate, I kept the lad well and strong by healthful exercise. The clergyman would sometimes complain to me of his pupil's laxness in certain studies, and while I, with much gravity, would reprove young Sir Hillary Gabriel Grenville, as his mother had named him, I could never in my own heart find regret for such remissness. When a man is tearing at your throat with his teeth, or trying to perforate your body with a rapier, it is of little real value to be able to *hic* and *hoc* it in scholarly terms. It is at such times as these that a blow from the shoulder or a cunning thrust or parry are needed, and as I regard such exciting doings as the greatest moments in a man's life, I am convinced that a knowledge of fencing is worth more than an acquaintance with all the classics in the world. Be that as it may, however, between us, we turned Sir Hillary into a fine, strapping lad, handsome as a picture, and as willing to fight as any father could desire. But as he grew older it slowly dawned on me that no child was ever more closely cast in the image of its sire, for Sir Hillary Grenville at twenty-one might have passed anywhere for the Captain Carleycroft who made me prisoner at Naseby, and years later, in the bitterest despair, rode alone into the west.

Before the dust had fairly sunk to rest on the road-bed, I heard a gay tune floating out on the soft breeze behind me, and only for the shaping of the air into

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a popular ditty of the day I could have sworn it was a bullfinch piping, so clear and flute-like were the notes. I turned quickly and found myself facing as pretty a lass as it has ever been my pleasure to rest eyes on.

Her mouth was puckered up to shrill the music, and looked marvellously like a strawberry wet and shining with the dew of a summer morning; but as I took off my beaver a smile that would take no refusal struggled through the drawn-up lips and spoiled the melody she was whistling.

"For shame, Captain Weatherby," said the girl, reproachfully. "You should have let me finish."

"Not one word said I, mistress," I answered, in an injured tone.

"But you *looked*, Captain."

"Your mirror will offer my excuses to-night if you consult it, Mistress Charity."

"I shall blush directly, I am certain," she chirped. "Tell me, am I not blushing?"

I looked at her critically.

"Not a blush," said I. "Not even the symptom of one."

"How very dreadful of me! What must you think of me, sir, since I do not blush?"

"If your cheeks were very red, I might think you could not."

"Fie!" said the maid. "Watch me, sir."

By some curious muscular contraction she wiggled her ears back and forward a tiny distance, and, while

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I chuckled at the droll performance, a deep blush appeared on her cheeks and spread quickly downward to where the white cloth, which she wore loosely knotted, hid her round throat.

"Bravo!" I cried.

"I thought I could manage it," she answered, with a merry ripple of laughter. "Do you know, Captain, Lady Kitty Larkin would give a thousand pounds to learn the trick."

"Egad, I believe it; but what prank are you playing now, mistress?"

As I spoke I stepped back that I might the better survey her in my astonishment. She was a luscious morsel of girlhood. She wore a gray frock that was fitted as prettily to her slender figure as any grand lady could have wished, but simply, almost severely, plain in its trim and cut. Around her waist, tied in a bow at the back, was belted a broad black ribbon; and this with her white collar and cuffs and the soft silk tied at her neck finished the costume of the little maid whose beauty was already famous in the surrounding country; for, as the Rose of Devon, Mistress Charity, only daughter of the rich old Puritan, Merciful Holliston, was the favorite toast of the young bloods for miles around.

My ward was probably the only youth in the vicinity who had not languished and sighed and written doggerel in her honor, and, as he had never been so fortunate as to be presented, the reason of his exemption can readily be understood, for it was hardly a year since she had been brought home from school

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to keep her father's house. Sir Hillary imagined that he had avoided the girl. He professed himself to be heartily sick of hearing her praises chanted at every turn, and as the result of some strange run of circumstances they never met at the different merry-makings, for it was but seldom that stern Master Holliston permitted her to attend what he considered the frivolous and mischievous gatherings of the young folks; and when she did lend her presence to the festivities, it so chanced that Sir Hillary had some other fish to fry in the neighborhood. When, more than once, I told him of the girl's rare grace and beauty, he laughed at my descriptions, and vowed that I and the others who shared my opinion were poor judges of a woman's looks. But I bided my time without vexation, for I knew that sooner or later the pair would meet, and if I were half as well acquainted with the young baronet as I fancied, this was the woman of all women for him.

She wore no hat, and the curls ostensibly pinned on the top of her head were half tumbled over her neck and shoulders as though she had been romping. But this was not what had occasioned my surprise. Strange to say, this little heiress—for Merciful Holliston was reputed to be enormously wealthy—bore on her arm a water-bucket that had evidently seen much usage and was anything but a toy.

"You wonder at my pail?" said she. "Pooh! That is nothing. My pride is being humbled, Captain Weatherby, and this bucket is the humbler. You see, my head is filled to overflowing with fine

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lady's whimsies, and I carry it much higher than is seemly for any decent, well-conducted lass, so my father says, and, therefore, he proposes to reduce me to the proper state of humility by sending me to fetch water from the tavern well, since our own, thanks to the sad fate of a stray pullet, is at present unfit for drinking purposes."

"The deuce you say," said I.

"The deuce I don't," said she, mocking me, for she possessed much talent in the art of mimicry. "If you will but watch keenly, you can no doubt see my pride evaporating."

And she laughed again with such a merry jingle of pretty sounds that I could not help joining in, though my hoarse guffaw chimed but discordantly with her tinkling merriment.

"As I live," said I, "you take your punishment with a light heart."

"Egad!"—the girl was mimicking me again—"it is best that I should, for he who gave it did so heavy-hearted. My poor old dad loves his worldly and frivolous daughter, and because I know of that same love I endure his rules and regulations, and bide at home with him frequently when I am sadly missed at some neighboring damsel's rout. Oh me! When all is done and said, I fear I am a sad gad-about."

So meek and despondent did Mistress Charity look as she stood there with downcast eyes that I was about to essay some words of comfort, when suddenly one white feather-fringed lid lifted and winked at me

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with a roguery that showed I had fallen a victim to another of her tricks.

"You would console me?" she said, demurely. "Truly it is to the elderly gentlemen we maids must look for gallantry."

I bit my mustache savagely. The conscienceless minx was making sheep's-eyes at me, a man old enough to be her father, as she stood there swinging her bucket.

"Have you taught your ways and manners to your ward, Captain?" she inquired.

So, after all, she took an interest in that graceless young swaggerer.

"I do my best," I answered, "but I fear the training he needs is that of a woman's hand."

"Indeed?" said Mistress Charity, as though greatly surprised. "Why, then, I am misinformed, for I most surely believed that he had no lack of such teaching."

Decidedly, Sir Hillary's reputation as a rake was growing since this little Puritan maid had heard rumors of his gallantry.

"They have taught him *games*," I answered. "From the lady of whom I speak he will receive a *lesson*, and one, egad, that he needs."

"In holding hands, perhaps," she said, as though misunderstanding me, "or even in sighing on one knee with his hand pressed to his heart and the languishing look of the upturned orbs of a dying duck in his blue eyes. I' faith, if I had ever had such experience, I think I would apply for the task of in-

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structing him; but, alas! I am only an innocent, ignorant country damsel who knows not the ways of men." As if to emphasize her general meekness she skilfully kicked off the head of the tallest daisy within reach with the toe of her shoe, then gravely stood the bucket upside down on the grass, and, mounting it, began jiggling on its bottom as prettily as any dancing-master could have done.

I clapped my hands and roared with laughter, for while she danced she kept her face drawn down in a doleful expression so characteristic of our good parson that there was no mistaking the person imitated. She paused for breath, and, still standing on the pail, reprov'd a refractory curl that had blown close to her cheek with a tickling touch that annoyed her.

"Behold," said she, "the Goddess Terpsichore upon her pedestal. Your hand, gentle sir, that I may descend in safety."

As I stepped forward with my best bow and offered my arm, this pretty kitten leaned on it heavily, and laboriously stepped down from the bucket with a gasp and groan and a smothered squeal so like to the way that the asthmatic and would-be youthful maiden aunt of Lady Kitty Larkin descended from her carriage at morning service that I chuckled until my sides were sore, in spite of her hurt and reproachful stare delivered through an imaginary lorgnette, in mockery of the French gimcrack that was affected by the same good lady.

"You are merry, Captain Weatherby," observed

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Mistress Charity, with an air of gentle melancholy. "I trust it is not from over-indulgence in the pleasures of the table. I have seen with much pain that a fondness for wine-bibbing is exceedingly prevalent in the neighborhood. Let me hope that you do your best to keep your young ward beyond the reach of such carnal influences."

"You seem interested in Sir Hillary," I said, for this was the second time she had spoken of him.

"Think you so? Well, I must be going," she said with a sigh, as though leaving me was to her a source of much sorrow.

"May I not accompany you to carry the pail?"

"Not you, sir. If lugging this bucket will humble me, I intend to obtain, as speedily as possible, all the good it can bring."

Then, as she tripped lightly down the road, she staggered a little to one side, raised one hand towards the sky, and remarked with a hiccough:

"Shee ze moon, Weth'sby. Zere's a lady in it, as I'm a Grenville. Wether'sby, you ole spoil-sport, go home 'lone. I shall seek ze lady in ze moon. It's only a step from zis stately elm to ze place, and if there be not a welcome waiting from the lady for a gallant spark, my name is not Sir Hillary Gabriel Grenville, lineal descendant of Apollo and Olympian Jove, by'r' lady, s'help me!"

And with this startlingly life-like imitation of a recent midnight performance of my ward when passing the gate of her father's property on his way home from a late supper with Sir Timothy Topleigh, the

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artful young joker ran quickly around the bend in the road.

As I stood looking after her there arose a sound of voices inside the wall, and some one broke into a song as the whole party came trooping down from the hall.

"A lovely place, Lady Kitty," I heard a deep barytone say. "Let's bring the table here, Hillary."

"Truly, Humphrey, you have found the ideal spot for our supper. With the horizon for walls and the sky for a roof we will not lack for air."

"Or for insects," put in a shrill voice that I knew for Lady Kitty's.

"Of them we will make a new sauce for the salad. Eh, Tim?"

"Horrible! Sir Hillary, you are a wretch!"

"Not so, Lady Kitty. Be angry with me, and I shall be wretched."

"What has become of your precious guardian?"

"No doubt he is paying his *devoirs* to the cook, or is cooling himself in the tide of the wine-bin," I heard Sir Hillary answer, with a laugh. He was always most respectful.

"You slander the poor man, I vow," said a voice that I recognized as Mistress Banthorpe's, whose desire to terminate the days of her spinsterhood had already caused me much annoyance.

"I saw him come this way," replied the barytone.

"A stool, then, and I will peek over the wall. Steady, now!"

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Immediately there appeared in view the head and shoulders of my former ward, Sir Hillary Grenville.

"Ah, the dear man is strolling by the road-side, good friends. He searches for a horse-shoe to bring him luck that his thirst may never desert him. What, ho! old Cock o' the Walk! Pet of the Ladies, we miss you from our circle. What are you doing there?"

Then, as some one shook the stool on which he was perched, he gave a shriek of mimic terror.

"Stop it!" he cried. "What's that? A pin! By the King, madam, if you prick me I'll have a kiss to heal my wound. Get away! Ouch!" He disappeared, and at once there was heard a chorus of laughter and squeals beyond the wall.

"I told you I'd have it," cried Sir Hillary, in triumphant tones.

"Rascal! How dare you?"

"I drew my courage from your eyes, my kisses from your lips. Toby, there's an idea for a song. Help! Help! She will murder me, and all for a kiss!"

The gate was thrown violently open by Sir Hillary, who pulled it to behind him, and held it fast on the outside in spite of the efforts of a gayly dressed young lady to poke him with a long pin through the bars. Finding this impossible, she desisted, saying, "Sir Hillary, if you dare to enter before half an hour has passed, I will perforate you like a colander."

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"Would you drive me from your side, cruel one?" laughed the lad.

"If you would know, set your foot inside the gate before I summon you, but thank only yourself if the result be fatal," she answered, shaking the pin at him threateningly before she disappeared.

Hillary left the gate and came gayly down to me.

"Faugh!" he remarked, with a grimace. "I feel as though I had been nibbling a paint-brush. Guardy, why will she lay it on so thick? Egad, to find the lady one would need a shovel."

"As you are now over age, you are not a *minor*, and cannot be expected to follow the calling," I answered, for it was frequently a matter of competition to see which of us could make the worst pun.

"That is worse even than your average joke," said Hillary, ruefully. "Really, I think I had rather face Lady Kitty's pin than endure such tawdry quips. That at least has a point."

I chuckled, for I remembered one night when I was awakened from a sound sleep, just before dawn, by a chorus of young bucks, led by Sir Hillary in the double capacity of tenor and author, chanting beneath my window:

"Let the *weather* be good or bad,
'Tis good enough for *Weatherby*."

It is quite needless to say this shocking performance banished all desire for sleep from my eyes, so I had nothing left but to arise, dress, and join the party, which then proceeded in straggling array to

pay its respects to the bell-pulls, knockers, and sign-posts of the neighboring inhabitants.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Hillary, suspiciously.

"The effervescence of youthful spirits proved too much for my old head, so I thought to grow sober by myself," I answered.

"A new idea," said he. "I know it is possible to grow drunk alone, though I hold it at best a doubtful practice, but, on my honor, I thought sobriety easiest obtained in company with a faithful friend or two and a capable pump."

"You have had as much as is good for you, young gentleman."

"Quite true, but to me the real enjoyment comes only when I have enough to be bad for me," he answered.

"You will not wait long if I am any judge."

"There be none better, Guardy. Hark you, sirrah, when I peered over the wall you had on your pretty face an infernally kittenish leer—almost a look of maidenly consciousness, on my word. This desertion of good and, thanks to the wine, fast bettering company is confoundedly suspicious, to say the least. What irresistible temptation has led you here?"

"I was engaged in pious meditation—"

"I know," he interrupted. "You were pondering on the manifold and seasoned charms of Mistress Banthorpe, who is ancient enough to be a saint without boring one with a halo, and, while by no means

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a skittish chicken, could she kick up her heels with the same speed at which her tongue runs you would have a merry chase to capture her, were she not so unbecomingly anxious for any kind of a husband, *even you, Guardy mine.*"

With that he fetched me a slap on the shoulder that sent me half-way across the road.

"You young villain!" I gasped.

Sir Hillary burst into song at once, favoring me with a patter ditty at this time immensely popular among the young bloods for reason of its very inanity:

"Oh, I love to be a villin,
And to murder I am willin',
For I find adventure thrillin',
Tho' the hangman's rope is killin';
And I'd rather rob on the King's highway, where every purse
is mine,
Than settle down with a scolding wife 'neath a morning-
glory vine."

"Devil take the silly rhyme!" I cried, in a rage.

"Not so," he answered—"a beautiful sentiment most poetically expressed."

Then he gazed thoughtfully at me for a moment, meanwhile twisting one of his love-locks in his fingers.

"Well, what now, Sir Guzzler?" I asked.

"Quarter me," he cried, "if I don't believe you were here to keep tryst with some wood-cutter's daughter."

"Not I."

The sounds of merriment behind the wall had continued since the expulsion of the young baronet, but he did not seem anxious to return to his company.

"If there was a woman," he continued, gayly, "where is she now? If there wasn't a woman, and there should have been, why the devil don't she keep her engagements? I'll not have guardian of mine so flouted by any female."

As he rattled on, he strode down the road to the bend, and stood looking round it in the direction which Mistress Charity had taken.

"By the Sword of Prince Rupert!" he shouted, "I see her coming this moment. She lugs a bucket on her arm. 'Tis Phyllis returning from a wrestle with the cows, the prize borne in her milking-pail triumphantly. Doubtless she has a hand like a ham and an ankle like a gate-post. Oh, Guardy! Guardy! For shame, Sir Libertine! A man of your age romancing with a scullery-maid. Oh, Shades of Corrydon, I blush for you!"

"Confound you, boy! that is no serving-maid."

"Oh, she is a Venus, I know," he jeered. "The personified poetry of bucolic idyls embodied in a dairy wench. No doubt, she is an angel in the bargain, likewise in the barn-yard with the other heifers. There, there! Of course she is. Since you will have it so, I'll crown her Queen of Rustic Beauty, and kiss her calloused hand in pious attitude."

I made no answer, for I knew his tune would change when she came near enough to show her good looks.

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Sir Hillary had his mind made up to have a joke by hook or by crook, so he hastened back, and, seizing me by the arm, dragged me behind a bush nearby.

"I will allow her to pass, then clap my hands over her eyes, and we will hear what man's name comes quickest to her lips. If it be yours, Guardy, you will foot the evening's reckoning at the Cock Robin. If not, my purple ostrich plume shall be your own. Do you agree?"

I accepted the proposition cheerfully enough, for I could not lose according to my way of thinking, and the feather was certainly monstrous fine.

"Moreover," I added, "I will even present you to the maid when your trick-playing is over."

"Tut!" said this respectful young gentleman. "Are you sure she is a proper person for me to meet? Remember my youth and innocence."

"Confound you, sir! Your innocence would take a good memory, while your youth is only too apparent. Ah! You see her, do you, Master Fly-away?"

Charity had passed the bend, and with dripping bucket was advancing towards us. Sir Hillary did not answer, so I turned and found him staring at the girl through the leaves of the shrub concealing us as though transfixed.

"Well, what ails you now?" I asked.

"A princess," he murmured. "As I live, a fairy princess from the realm of Poesy. Who is she, sir? Her name, Guardy, I beg of you?"

"She is the daughter of a wood-chopper," I an-

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swered, maliciously, "fresh from the barn-yard and the other heifers."

As I spoke she set down the pail, and stood beside it resting.

"Her name, sir?"

"Phyllis she is called, and she works in the scullery."

He groaned softly at the memory of his folly.

"Observe her hamlike hand," I added.

"Wretch!" he whispered. "It is a sacrilege."

"Note, also, her ankle like a post," I went on, resolved not to spare him.

"Mercy; I beg it, sir! Be generous to a repentant sinner. Tell me her name?" he pleaded.

"Then know, Sir Hillary, that this is Mistress Holliston, the so-called Rose of Devon."

"She is perfect," he whispered.

"What did I tell you months ago?"

"You did not do half justice to her charms."

I laughed softly.

"You vowed no woman lived who could equal my description," I said.

"What can the blind know of light until they see?" he answered. Truly the girl was making havoc, and quite unconsciously, for she had no thought that two earnest admirers were so near at hand. As she bent over to pick up the pail there came a peal of laughter from behind the hedge. She straightened up, leaving the bucket undisturbed, and stood listening.

"They are having a party," she said to herself.

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"What fun. Horrid old things to have such a good time while my pride is being humbled with a bucket of water."

Then, sad to relate, she deliberately made a funny little grimace that tied her pretty face into a knot of tangled features in the direction of the merri-ment.

"Bah!" said she. "What do I care? I much doubt if Sir Hillary is nearly as handsome as they say; besides, if he is half as fond of that cat, Lady Kitty, as she thinks he is, I wouldn't let him kiss the tiniest tip of my little finger."

With a sigh she turned again to her bucket, but evidently reconsidering her determination, began to stir the grass with one little foot, while she moved slowly up and down as though in search of something.

"The wench would look well wrestling with cows," I whispered.

"Guardy, if you call her a wench again, I'll knock your silly old head off your shoulders."

"You called her a bucolic Venus," I protested.

"Hush, or she will hear you."

"What is the wen—er—lady—doing?"

"She is looking for a four-leaf clover, I fancy."

At this moment Mistress Charity found what she sought, and, plucking it in triumph, straightway sat herself down on the grass, and, blissfully ignorant of our proximity, undid her shoe.

"What is she doing that for?" I asked.

"Have you never heard the legend?"

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"Not I."

"Why, if the lass who finds the lucky clover puts it in her shoe, the first man she meets is bound to become her husband."

"Indeed? Then, with your kind permission, I will make my escape," I said, quickly, "for I never take any unnecessary risks in such matters."

"Keep them busy, so that I am not disturbed," Sir Hillary commanded. "Tell them I have gone to the inn for more wine. 'Twill please the greedy brutes."

I crept quietly up the bank, and, keeping under cover of the shrubs, reached the gate undiscovered. Before entering the park I looked back. The lad was dusting his boots with his lace handkerchief behind the bush, and Mistress Charity, pail in hand, with skirts picked up to avoid the dripping, was coming up the road.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR HILLARY GRENVILLE ENCOUNTERS THE ROSE OF DEVON

THE young baronet edged slowly round the shrub as the girl passed it; then, stepping out on the road, coughed gently, and with eyes bent on the ground moved at a deliberate pace in the same direction. Charity turned, her attention attracted by the slight noise, and discovered Sir Hillary, as she thought, before he had become aware of her presence. She let go her dress, and, quite regardless of the fact that it swung perilously near the dripping water that bejewelled the bottom of the pail, stood gazing at the youth who had so suddenly appeared. She had never considered herself in the slightest degree susceptible, and, in fact, was somewhat inclined to believe that the standard of masculine physical beauty was set disappointingly low, in spite of the many dashing blades who had aspired to her favor; but such a splendid young beau had never before been presented to her criticism. To say that Sir Hillary found instant favor in her eyes would be to express feebly the impression made on her girlish heart by his six feet two of manly beauty. She

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stood staring at him, with lips parted a tiny space, and eyes full of mild surprise and delight, not unmixed with maidenly consternation and a little fear at the realization of danger, made but too evident by the admiration and pleasure caused her at the discovery of so attractive a member of the opposite sex. She felt her peril, and made a determined effort to shake off the spell which she realized had fallen on her at the moment she bestowed her first approving glance on the lad.

"I'll wager he is a perfect milk-sop," she murmured to herself, "without a thought beyond his pretty clothes, or courage born of aught but the desire to keep safe his good looks."

Then she turned her back on him as he apparently became aware of her presence for the first time and raised his eyes in polite surprise.

"Ahem!" said Sir Hillary.

Mistress Charity decided to act as though entirely oblivious to the proximity of the young gentleman. She also made up her mind to go directly up the highway at her best pace, without looking round, which would show this impertinently attractive fellow how little impression his airs and graces had made. This was doubtless the reason that she set down the pail and turned to face Sir Hillary.

To say that Charity Holliston was unaware of her own charms would be to entirely misrepresent the young lady as well as to throw a shadow of doubt upon the cleverness which raised her so far above the other damsels of the neighborhood. When she turned in

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Sir Hillary's direction, she expected to create a great impression with the beauty then flashed upon him. No doubt he would be far greater struck by her appearance than she had been by his; and if this were so, when they became acquainted it would be comparatively an easy matter to reduce him to the rank of her other admirers; for that he would admire her was, of course, more than certain; so her astonishment can be readily conceived when he apparently failed to notice that she was even pretty. He seemed to quite overlook the blue eyes, at this moment sadly pensive, the impertinent little nose and pretty mouth with the snowy hint of further charms hidden by lips curling with mild surprise and maidenly confusion as she *discovered* that there was a man in the immediate vicinity. He did not look as though he thought she presented to him a worthy candidate for approval. Of what use were a pretty face and faultless figure since they were so completely disregarded? Was it possible that this seemingly intelligent young person was really so grossly ignorant and lacking in taste that he did not know the prettiest girl in Devon, or all England for that matter, when he met her? Or—horrors!—did he know some other woman who was more comely? That such a damsel should exist was of course not *absolutely* impossible, though hardly probable. For instance, if he had a sister who resembled *him* strongly, and was proportionately more attractive, as is usual in the gentler sex, she feared that that young lady would be more pleasing than she herself; but then handsome brothers rarely have

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more than passable sisters, which was as it should be; for if beauty were a general possession, a homely face by its oddity would rise to a premium, and perhaps ugliness, on account of its scarcity, would even command the homage now yielded by adoring swains to rosy cheeks, well-rounded shapes, and pretty features. The blush that pinked her winsome face this time was not produced by calculated effort. On the contrary, it was the result of mingled embarrassment and surprise.

"Sukey," said the young man, in a tone of pleasant condescension, "I have lost two guineas."

Sukey! He had so addressed *her*. Of all impudence ever before heard of, surely— *Good Heavens!* He took her for a servant. What an absolute fool!

It was true her dress was plain—and she wore an apron—and her hair was tumbled—and she carried a bucket of water—and she had no hat; but then!—

Men, of course, were never very intelligent, and thus such a mistake might not indicate entire insanity on the part of the error-maker; so she quickly decided that she would trick him rarely, and tell of it afterwards to punish him for his lack of discernment. Since he had called her Sukey, a Sukey would she be until she had accomplished his befoolment, and then?—well, then she would see.

Mistress Charity dropped Sir Hillary a humble courtesy, and looked as though she felt greatly honored at being addressed by such a pretty gentleman.

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"How do you know my name, good sir?" quoth she.

"You look it," he answered, with calculated cruelty.

"And what was it you said? You so startled me—almost took my breath away—"

She appeared quite embarrassed.

"Of course it is seldom you see such a gentleman," he said, graciously; "but try to calm yourself. I shall not harm you. Don't stare; there's a good wench."

She looked wonderingly at him, as she thought a serving-maid would most likely do.

"I lost two guineas," repeated Sir Hillary, "on the road as I was taking a stroll."

"Yes, sir."

Another courtesy.

"And a deal of money it is, too," she put in, "even for a fine gentleman."

Courtesy number three.

Quite true, and would she just as leave stop bobbing up and down and making a fool out of herself?

She would if it pleased him; so she merely stood there with her finger in her mouth, while she endeavored to look as admiring as she really felt.

"Sukey," said Sir Hillary, "you are rather pretty, though I am not quite sure that I like your nose."

"Indeed!" began Mistress Charity, in great indignation; then remembering the rôle she had assumed, she said,

"Yes, and please you, sir."

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Sir Hillary looked at her critically with a calmly insolent gaze.

"I am afraid that you are rather untidy, even for a serving-maid," he observed, with a sigh of regret, his eye on her tumbled hair.

"I do my best, your lordship," answered Charity, blushing in spite of herself.

"No doubt you do, my good girl," he went on, lazily, "but even that does not excuse you for trying to make off with my money."

"Your money, sir?" she repeated, in genuine wonderment. "What would I do with your money?"

"I can't be absolutely sure, Sukey, but probably you would buy a comb to hold that mane of yours in place—at least I hope so."

"Surely, sir, you are making game of a poor girl?"

"I never play games with poor girls. The rich ones occupy all the time I can spare to the sex," replied Sir Hillary, with a mental wink at himself. "So my good girl—"

"*His* good girl," thought Charity. To her astonishment the idea thus presented to her mind did not seem unpleasant.

—"I must trouble you to return my guineas," he concluded, with much gravity.

"Won't you believe me, sir?"

"I never believe any woman, not even an ugly one," Sir Hillary remarked, wickedly.

"It is not my fault that I am not better-looking,"

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she said, smothering her anger at his evident disapprobation.

"Come, come, my dear; I cannot be seen parleying with a serving-lass in public. How would it look? Return my money and get about your work or I will report you."

"To whom, sir?" she asked, curiously.

"To your master," he answered, promptly.

"Then you know him?"

"You serve Master Holliston," said he.

"How do you know?" she asked, in sudden suspicion.

"None but a good churchman would tolerate the impudence of a maid who so little knows her place and how to keep it. Will you give me my two guineas without more ado?"

"No, sir; I have not seen them, and I would not give them to you if I had."

"What, what?" said Sir Hillary, severely. "Your tongue is over-long. Were I your mistress, I'd snip it with the shears to punish you."

"Good Lord!" she cried, feigning terror. "I be saying naught but the truth."

"Don't be impudent, you hussy. A word from me to your employer would secure your discharge."

Charity looked absolutely terror-stricken at this. So well did she enact fright that the baronet could scarce restrain his laughter.

"Oh, sir!" she cried; "oh, sir, pray don't do that. I am the only support of a widowed husband with seven children, and they would starve if I lost my place."

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"What a genius for prevarication," thought Sir Hillary; but his face was as grave as a judge's as he eyed her, apparently pondering over her words.

"Seven children?" he repeated, reflectively. "I do not believe it. Three perhaps, or even four, but seven? Oh, never."

"Oh!" she cried, indignantly; and then angry that she had thrown herself so open, she said, crossly: "Not mine, sir. He had 'em when I married him."

Sir Hillary looked shocked.

"What a most immoral man! I fear you were hardly particular in your choice."

Charity blushed again furiously, and continued her fabrication.

"I am his second wife, sir. He was married once before."

"So I should infer. And you? Were you married before?"

"Not I. I only married him because he dared me to."

"Hem!" said Sir Hillary. "I fancy that to be a much better reason than some which have led to very great marriages."

"I left him because I am misunderstood. He does not know what a lucky man he is," she continued, in a plaintive tone.

"To be left alone?" queried the young joker.

"No, sir; to have such a wife."

"Hem!" said Sir Hillary again. "He must be a foolish brute."

And with that he chucked her under the chin.

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She bit her lip to keep from giggling. Such familiarity was a new experience.

"Now kindly hand me my two guineas, and for a reward I will give you a kiss," he said, as though growing weary.

"How dare!—I mean, I don't understand," she answered, edging away, with her mind half made up to seek safety in flight. Sir Hillary laughed loudly.

"Oh yes you do, child. I lost my coins here, and you found them. Give them up like an honest lass, and I will make no complaint. Refuse, and I'll have you clapped into the stocks for a pilferer."

As he spoke he looked up the road with an exclamation of surprise. Mistress Charity turned her head as he had expected, and before she could face him again he skilfully dropped a golden guinea into the pail of water.

"It is useless to fib," he continued, "for I saw you pick them out of the grass and hide them in your shoe."

"Ah!" she said, in confusion, "you were watching me? Spy! For shame, sir."

"Thief," answered Sir Hillary, not a whit rebuked. "What is that in your bucket?"

"There is nothing there."

"There is one of my guineas, as I live. You sly baggage to hide it so cunningly. Come, now, off with your shoe, and out with the water from your pail, or the Justice of the Peace shall deal with you."

Charity could not help admiring his cleverness,

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but she rallied from her apparent defeat in a twinkling.

"Since here is your coin," said she, holding out the pail, "pray take it, sir."

"First," answered Sir Hillary, "pour out the water, you minx, and be careful lest you spatter me."

"Not I," replied Charity. "It is no easy task lugging it from the inn. If you wish your guinea, good sir, take it out yourself, or if you spill the water I will sit here and wait while you go to the well for more."

With that she sat down on a grassy bank and looked up innocently at Sir Hillary. He seemed to be considering her proposition, but in reality he was wondering if Providence realized how immeasurably superior this little maid was to all the rest of woman-kind and did not feel proud of its handiwork.

"My lace ruffles and my delicate health prevent my following your suggestion," he answered; "but I will give you a shilling if you pick it out for me."

"A shilling!" cried she, in delight. "But the shoe?"

"I—er—er—ahem! I will recover that one myself," replied Sir Hillary, with a wicked glint in his eyes.

"Will you, though?" thought Charity, as she began to roll up her sleeve.

"I hope she has a pretty arm," said Sir Hillary to himself; but she caught his eager glance and pulled down her cuff.

"On second thoughts I will not. Give me two

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shillings and you can have bucket and all to do with what you will."

"Good!" cried the youth, highly pleased with the game he was playing on the unsuspecting Charity, for that he thought her aught but a serving-maid had long since been banished from her mind. "And you, pretty lass, though really not so pretty, shall have a kiss in the bargain."

"But if I don't want the kiss?" she protested.

"It goes with the two shillings," Sir Hillary answered, severely. "Don't argue, young woman, but take what Heaven sends you in silent thankfulness."

As he spoke he approached her with the intent of kissing writ plainly on his handsome face. This was more than Charity had bargained for, and she rose to her feet precipitately.

"Good sir," she said, waving him back, "enough of this joke."

"Of all insolent serving-maids!" he cried, in great indignation.

"But I am *not* a serving-maid," she answered, beginning to wish herself out of the scrape, for could he boast of one caress it would more than offset all the ridicule the telling of this adventure would heap upon him in the future, when she should make it known to bring about his discomfiture.

"I am not a serving-maid," she repeated.

Sir Hillary tossed back his curls with a jeering laugh.

"Of course you are not," he replied. "No doubt you are my fairy godmother come here to give me

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three wishes. First, I wish for my money; then I wish for a kiss, Sukey; and then—then I wish for more kisses.”

“You ninny!” she cried, genuinely angry now; and as she spoke she stamped her foot.

“Calling names is not nice, Sukey,” he observed, reprovingly.

“My name is not Sukey.”

“You can’t blame me for that. As I am neither of your parents, I did not christen you.”

“You silly fool, if you dare, I—I—!”

“No doubt you will, Sukey. You have not been in service long, or you would know better than to refuse—”

“I am not in service,” she cried, in a great temper now. “This pail is but a joke.”

“Ho, ho!” he laughed. “A good joke, for, unlike your story, it holds water. Gadzooks! Next thing I know, Godmother, you will say you are the great heiress, Mistress Charity Holliston, or the Queen of England.”

“I am she.”

“Your Majesty,” he said, bowing low.

“No, no, you goose, the other.”

“Your Highness—”

“If I had a face like the Queen I would wear a mask,” she replied, indignantly. “I *am* Charity Holliston, and I pray you cease annoying me.”

“You!—you?” he laughed. “Pshaw, a silly pretence. They say Mistress Holliston is beautiful, and yet you have the impudence to declare that you

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are she, when on the face of it, or rather on the face of *you*, it is proven false."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in despair. "Is there no way I can prove that I speak truly?"

"I fear there is none," he answered; then growing indignant in his turn, he went on, angrily:

"Do you think that I will believe that sweet Mistress Holliston—our treasured Rose of Devon—would flirt and flaunt it on the King's highway with such an addle-pated gadabout as Hillary Grenville? Nonsense; she would blush at the thought."

"Then you are young Sir Hillary?"

"Truly, I am, Sukey."

"I do not believe it," Mistress Charity answered; and as her eye rested on the pail a thought flashed into her mind that removed all that she felt of either fear or anger.

"Why not, Sukey?" he asked, with another laugh.

"Because, wild though he is, I have always heard that Sir Hillary is a gentleman, and surely you cannot claim a like reputation," she said, triumphantly.

"What!" he cried. "You dare, Sukey? Now to pay you I will have a dozen kisses instead of one."

As he spoke, Sir Hillary reached out his hands to seize her, but, like a cat, she glided beneath one arm and reached the road; then, as he came leaping down from the grassy bank, she picked up the pail and threw its contents in his face, drenching him from head to foot with spring-water.

"The devil!" he cried, in a rage; but she only laughed exultantly, and flinging the bucket at his

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shins, fled wildly up the road as he caught his foot in it, and, still blinded by the water, fell full length on the dusty highway.

Thus ended the first meeting of Sir Hillary Grenville and the Rose of Devon.

CHAPTER IX

SIR HILLARY AND MISTRESS CHARITY DECLARE A TRUCE

HAVING just read over the last chapter in which my erstwhile guardian describes my encounter with Mistress Holliston on the highway, I feel inspired to do a little scribbling myself, so, while Captain Weatherby re-reads and corrects his manuscript, I will scratch down a chapter or two with his quill before joining King William at the Court, where my duties as Master of Horse make necessary my presence in the course of another hour.

My feelings when I squirmed in the soft dust, which was instantly changed to a mush-like mud by the water dripping from my garments, while in my ears sounded laughter clear and silvery in its girlish glee, are best left undescribed. I feel quite certain that I swore. Nay, I will take my oath no more sincere and easy-flowing profanity was ever poured out upon the summer breezes, but I was not so great a sinner as would at first appear, for I heard the patter of little feet flying up the road before I un-

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burdened myself of my wrath and indignation at being so outwitted and beaten by a mere slip of a girl. I wiped the water from my eyes with a ruffle, for no man ever received a greater dousing—I streamed with it from my crown to my waist—and having kicked the villanous bucket that had caused my downfall across the road, I rose to my feet. Not a soul was in sight, and as I stood there, a sorry spectacle, I mentally thanked my lucky star that there had been no witnesses to my defeat and humiliation. My new clothes were hopelessly ruined. My whole front was one great cake of mud. My curls were stringy and clinging to my lace collar with a moist reluctance to relinquish their adherence. And altogether I was as different from the immaculately attired young beau of a few moments before as a person could possibly imagine. This was the end of my practical joke. I had teased and baited the little damsel to my heart's content, and not satisfied with that must seek from her a further favor to mark more vividly in my memory our first encounter. Well, I had gotten it with a vengeance, and that vengeance had been sweet Mistress Holliston's. I ground my teeth at the recollection.

"I will be even yet," I muttered, as I wiped the mud from my face with my handkerchief.

A peal of laughter came from my friends behind the wall. This roused me to a sense of my danger. If they discovered me in my present plight the news of my discomfiture would travel from one end of the shire to the other, and, as I had no mind to be the

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laughing-stock of the country-side, I hurried up the road till well out of their sight and hearing. Seizing hold of a stout limb which a willow had thrust defiantly over the wall, with its aid I swung myself into the park, and sneaked quietly up to the hall. Then, having changed my costume from top to toe, I helped myself to a noggin of neat brandy, to ward off a possible chill, and went down to join the party at dinner. As I drew near the table, which had been placed in a corner of the park where the turf was as flat and even as a board floor, I saw my guardian—for so I call the dear old fellow even to this day—coming up from the little gate opening on the road.

“You come in time,” he shouted, as he caught sight of me. “There is an elderly dame waiting at the road with a note for you, which she refuses to deliver into any hand but yours.”

“I will see to her,” I said. Then, as I saw him give my suit of maroon satin a wondering glance, I gripped him by the arm.

“Mind your own affairs,” I whispered, “and don’t plague me with silly questions.”

Before he recovered sufficiently from his surprise to make answer, I hastened down to the gate with a wave of my hand to my cousin Humphrey, who was still busying himself in the adornment of the table, while the others were playing games among themselves.

A queer little old woman, shawled and hooded, bent with age, and leaning heavily on a crooked stick, was waiting at the road-side.

A TRUCE DECLARED

"Good-day, dame," said I, politely, for I find it profitable to stand well in the graces of all women, irrespective of age or beauty.

"Be you Sir Hillary Grenville?" she asked, in a high, piping voice, with here and there a note that cracked into a squeak.

"I am, good dame," I answered, wondering what the old beldam could want of me.

"A fine lad you are, too," she remarked, shrilly.

As she had apparently glanced no higher than my knees, I could not help feeling that her judgment had been but lightly given, though I know a pretty leg is generally quickly recognized by a woman's eye, and I was well aware that I had no great reason to be ashamed of those with which I had been provided at birth.

"So some have said," I replied. "You have a letter for me, I believe?"

"Marry come up!" she piped, "and what do I get for it, young sir?"

"Is it from a lady?"

"Aye, a young thing at that."

"A shilling, dame."

She gave a grunt of disgust, and began hobbling up the road.

"Stop!" I cried. "I will make it five."

"You will hand me a guinea, young sir, and devil a penny less, or I will keep my letter," said the old extortioness.

"But—"

"Leave butting to older rams," she squeaked.

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

"You have no flock to care for that you must needs be so careful."

Without further parley I gave her the guinea and took the letter.

"There may be an answer," observed the old damsel. "I will wait and see, and should it be so it will cost you another golden boy to have me carry it."

I unfolded the paper, and, catching sight of the name written at the bottom, gave an exclamation of astonishment. It was signed Charity Holliston.

"Oh ho!" said the old dame, derisively. "Will you take a guinea for the letter now, young sir?"

In my haste to master the contents of this unexpected missive, I did not pause to answer her.

"Sir Trickster"—it began—

"Knowing full well how grieved you are over the recent bespattering of your pretty clothes, I send to you my laundress, a woman who is most wonderfully skilled in all matters of cleansing and renovating, whom, if suitably recompensed, will no doubt repair all damage wrought by the impertinent hand of Sukey.

"Trusting that you accept this proffered assistance in the spirit in which it is tendered, believe me,

"Ever most humbly,

"CHARITY HOLLISTON."

Here was cool impudence, if ever such a thing existed. Not content with ruining my newest suit, this spiteful maid must further deride me by de-

A TRUCE DECLARED

spatching these insulting lines by the old woman, who, cackling to herself in what she no doubt considered hearty laughter, was, of course, observing keenly my every movement that she might describe it on her return to her mischief-loving mistress. There is only one way to avoid the sting of the bee, so the old fable goes, and that is to stroke it softly on the forehead with a cobble-stone before it has used its weapon. To rob the girl's jest of its merriment, it was evident I must in all sobriety accept this ironical offer with sincere thankfulness, and I decided it would be a week before this aged merry-maker should join Mistress Charity again.

"Truly," I said, "your mistress is most considerate, and I shall gladly avail myself of your services. If you will have the kindness to follow me to the hall, I will see that whatever you may need to aid you in your task shall be at once forthcoming."

I thought I saw her start at this, and I was not surprised, for I had already in my own mind come to the conclusion that she was too elderly a woman to be a laundress, and was doubtless some old nurse or maid who had entered into the joke to please the girl she served, firmly convinced that I would indignantly spurn all offers of assistance.

"I will come in the morning," she piped, even shriller than before.

"Pardon me," I said, firmly, "but you will do exactly as I see fit."

"You threaten me, young sir, old enough to be your mother?"

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

"More likely grandmother," I put in. "Come, now, old lady, don't be angry. You will find me an easy master, and I have no doubt I will pay you far better than Mistress Holliston."

"Well, then," said this remarkable female, "you must let me choose my own wages."

"Even that shall be accorded you," I answered.

What she next observed was certainly surprising.

"'Tis years since I have been kissed by a lusty youth," quoth she, "and I would fain know such a pleasure again. Before I stir a step towards your hall I must have three kisses full on the mouth, young sir."

"What?" I cried. "You? Hanged if I do!"

"Yet you would have kissed my mistress if you could," she said, as though that were a reason I should so favor her.

"True," I answered, "but she is still young, though she does squint so lamentably."

"Whom do you mean?" demanded she.

"Why," said I, resolved to anger her, "Mistress Charity. If ever a lady had an eye with a fair list to starboard, it is your mistress."

"'Tis false," she cried, angrily.

"Like her hair," said I. "So it really is glass, eh?"

I thought the old creature would strike me with her crutch, for she fairly shook with rage.

"You know you are not speaking the truth," she squeaked, in a fine temper.

"Pooh!" I answered. "What does it matter?"

A TRUCE DECLARED

I never blame a maid for seeking to hide her defects. In fact, when I think how bad she might look so unadorned, I thank my stars she makes an effort to achieve the comeliness denied her by nature."

I paused, but the old crone saw how she had played into my hand and did not speak again.

"Come," said I, finally, "let us go up to the hall."

As I had confidently expected she would refuse, I was much astonished when she hobbled up the grass towards the gate. No doubt I would have been even more befooled this day had I been left to my own poor wits, but it seems that fate had decreed that I, in spite of my dulness, should have in my turn a taste of the sweets of triumph, for as the elderly go-between made her way slowly up the bank, her foot slipped, and she fell flat on the greensward; her skirt catching on a stray branch forgot its duty, and a tiny buckled shoe, a slender ankle, and I dare not say how much of silken hose were thrust before my sight. I ran to her side with a cry of triumph and surprise. Before she could regain her feet I had caught her in my arms, and as the old bonnet and gray horse-hair curls fell back on her shoulders, in spite of her frantic struggles, I kissed the Rose of Devon twice full on her sweet red mouth.

"Stop it!" she cried. "I will not—I will not! Oh, how can you, sir?"

"Three you demanded, and three you shall have," I said; and stooping, as one curl caught on a button of my coat, I took the treasure right from the mint itself. Then I released her.

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

The soft cheeks that had flushed so gloriously while I held Mistress Charity were now white with rage. Her eyes were blazing and her lips—those soft, rosy lips—were trembling, and when she spoke, after eying me from head to heel with a withering, scornful look, her voice quivered with anger.

“Oh, if I were a man,” she cried, “you would pay for this, sir.”

“Surely, Mistress Laundress, I have only given you the payment you demanded; still, if you wish more—”

“I—I will bite you, if you dare,” she answered, retreating a pace or two. “Oh, to be a man for five minutes, and if you would not have cause to regret this—this insult.”

“Pardon me,” I corrected. “There was more than one. Be grammatical, please. *These insults* you would say.”

“I would kill you if I could,” she cried, stamping the foot that had betrayed her disguise to me.

“I am over-young to die,” I answered, with a laugh, for my heart was blithe indeed since I was quits with this maiden jester.

“Had I a brother—” she began.

“He would slap my shoulder and say, ‘Egad, lad, you served her right’; and let me tell you, Mistress Charity, if you had your wish, and were a man for five minutes, you would get from me the soundest cudgelling any lad in your family ever had.”

“I am not sure that you will spare me as I am,” she said, her lip curling with scorn. “To flog a girl

A TRUCE DECLARED

would be some men's pleasure. See. There lies a stout stick. Why deny your brutal heart such an enjoyment?"

"I believe I will do it," I answered, resolved to frighten her if I could.

As I spoke I turned and stooped to pick up the cane on which she had leaned. Quick as a flash Mistress Charity sprang forward and shoved me with all her might head foremost into a shrub that was flowering by the road-side, and, throwing her old shawl and bonnet into the bushes, in a moment was running up the highway like a deer. My blood was up, and though I left half a ruffle on the bush as a souvenir of our meeting, I ran after her as fast as I could. Now, while I am something over six feet and lithe and slender, for once it seemed as though I had met my match as a runner, and I am not half sure that the chase would have terminated before we reached her father's property had she not trod on a stone that rolled beneath her foot, giving her ankle a twist that, while by no means a serious disablement, was more than enough to put an end to her running.

"You have caught me, Sir Bully," said she, sitting down on a hummock of grass to nurse her hurt.

"Do you think me blind that you give me this information, Mistress Slyboots?" I panted.

"I wish you were," she said, viciously. "Then I could fix my foot."

"Why, for that matter I can turn my back as easily as you turned your ankle," I said.

"I wouldn't trust you," she replied, spitefully.

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

"I might get behind a bush again," I suggested, smiling as I thought of the clover episode.

"Oh, you are the meanest thing!" she cried. "Will you never let me forget that piece of business?"

"No," I said, boldly. "I shall not, so why should you?"

"Luckily it can do without attention for a while," she answered, in a frigid tone, releasing her foot, and quite overlooking my remark.

"If I were blind," I continued, "I would not be able to see how pretty you are and thus be spared all this bother."

"You can go if you wish to," she said, in what sounded quite like an offended tone.

"You cannot," I answered.

"I can hobble along after a fashion."

"I mean I will not permit it," said I, sternly.

"What?" she cried. "Then I am a prisoner?"

"You have a duty to perform for which you have been already—er—recompensed. Your own word, I believe," I replied, quoting from the missive still in my possession.

She looked at me suspiciously.

On my soul it was all I could do to keep myself from dropping on my knees before her, and then and there crying out my admiration. You who read these lines will doubtless sniff at me for a fool, but pray bear in mind that I was a fiery youth of twenty-three, and until now had known no woman who in any great degree caught my fancy. This girl's beauty,

A TRUCE DECLARED

her gay humor, and wondrous cleverness, united, swept over my brain and heart, over my whole being like such a blush as at times seems to rise from every vein of the body to make a face glow in the acme of pride or humiliation. If it chances that you who follow this tale have never known such a moment of exultant weakness, I scarcely know whether to pity you for what you have so far been denied, or to envy you the joy that is yet to come; for that you will remain ever exempt from the tribute that Cupid thus exacts I do not believe.

"What duty have I to perform?" she demanded, innocently.

"You are to cleanse and renovate the suit you christened me in not an hour ago," I repeated, referring to her note a second time.

"You called me godmother, so it was but right a baptism should follow," she said, slyly.

"Did you give me a name also?" I asked.

"Can you doubt it, sir? I christened you Sir Impudence."

"Do you know what I call you?"

"No," she snapped, crossly, "and I care not."

"I call you adorable," I said, in my coolest manner.

She pouted, and the pucker of her lips was such as would tempt far more staid a man than I.

"Stop it," said I, warningly. "It looks like an invitation."

"How can you tell that?" she asked, as though in wonder. "You, who do not wait for one."

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"Look you, young lady," I answered, looking at her severely; "when it comes to a question of behavior, I can see but little choice between us."

"Explain, sir," said Mistress Charity. "I do not understand you."

"Willingly. While it is true I sought more than my deserts when you were playing Sukey with the pail, you most certainly were in search of what you had missed—thanks to the dousing you gave me—when you came back with your note."

"Not I, sir," she cried, in a tone of indignation.

"Nonsense. You asked three kisses, boldly and coldly."

"I did not think you would give them," she answered, struggling to repress a smile.

"I never deny any woman such a pleasure."

"You kiss any who ask you?" cried she, as though little pleased at the idea.

"Certainly," I answered, as carelessly as I could.

Immediately Mistress Charity produced a tiny shred of a handkerchief from somewhere and began rubbing her lips vigorously. I snapped it from her hand and implanted on its scented cambric a hearty smack.

"Oh!" she cried, then looked another way.

"Oh, what?" I asked, retaining the handkerchief as a trophy of the chase.

"You really mean what you said. *Any* woman, no matter who?"

I nodded my assent without hesitating a moment.

A TRUCE DECLARED

"Even Lady Kitty?" she persisted.

"Why, for that matter," I answered, "it is not an hour since I last kissed her"; and I laughed at the recollection.

"Good-bye," she said, shortly, rising to her feet and limping along the road. I walked beside her. Poor girl, she must have been quite turned around, for she was going towards the gate of my park instead of the direction of her home.

"But when I kissed Lady Kitty I had never seen you," I went on, in what I intended should be accents of comfort.

"As though I cared," she said, without looking at me.

"You do not care whom I kiss?" I asked.

"Not a whit," she answered, tossing her pretty head.

"Then if I so salute *you* again, you will not be angry?"

She laughed in spite of herself, and I took heart once more.

"Come," said I. "Why cannot we be friends?"

"I do not know you," she replied, haughtily.

I had forgotten this for a moment. No doubt it was a really serious obstacle.

"Quite true, but we may meet some day," I said, hopefully.

"Then will be time enough." Her voice was positively icy.

"Oh, gammon!" I remarked. "You know you do not mean what you say."

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"Prove it, sir," said the girl, defiantly, with her chin in the air.

"To begin with, after besting me with the bucket, you deliberately return and afford me the opportunity of getting even with you."

"How so?" she replied, as though greatly surprised.

"Why, like this. You doubtless intended to make a fool of me in the shire with your tale of my ducking."

"I shall do so yet," she declared, a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

"Not you, my girl. If you dare tell of that little affair, I will boast that the second time I met the Rose of Devon she begged for three kisses, which, sooner than hurt the poor girl's feelings, I gave her."

"You villain!" she exclaimed, in high dudgeon.

"Moreover, after receiving her reward, instead of proceeding homeward, she calmly and coolly returned to Grenville Hall with that young knave, Sir Hilary," I continued, sternly.

Either this girl was a fair creature most cruelly misunderstood, or fully the equal of Mistress Gwynne or any of her mates in the London play-houses.

"I am going in the wrong direction, it seems," she remarked, in surprise. "How silly of me to make such a mistake!"

And with that she turned around, cool as you please, and started back as she had come.

"One moment," said I, blocking her path. "Remember you are a prisoner."

A TRUCE DECLARED

"Is it so?" she asked, demurely. "Well, and may I not go, Master Jailer?"

"No," I replied. "First you must promise silence for silence in the matter of the ducking and the kissing."

"Since *you* are so afraid of gossip, I agree," she said, as though yielding the point from consideration for me.

"Second, you must regard me as a friend from now on and acknowledge me as such," I insisted.

"That is a more serious matter," she answered, doubtfully. "However, I will try to manage it, and doubtless your guardian will present you to me if you ask him very prettily."

"Third, you must come with me now and join my friends at my birthday dinner."

"No," she said, firmly. "May I be switched if I do. My presence might interfere with your wooing of Lady Kitty."

I took her by the ear, and in spite of her protests led her down the road like a naughty school-girl.

"Stop it, sir!" she cried. "Release me or I will scream."

"Had you rather I should carry you?" I demanded, eying her coolly.

"No," she answered, rubbing her ear. "I have no wish for you to sprain your back."

"Why won't you come to my party, Mistress Charity?" I asked, in a grieved tone.

"I promised my father never to set foot on the

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ground of your park a year ago," she said, without a trace of foolery.

"Truly?" I asked, in surprise.

"Truly," she answered. "He thinks you a monstrous rake. Otherwise I would gladly come."

"Well, then, on my honor, you shall accept my invitation and yet keep your promise," said I, firmly.

"Really? Oh, you are so clever!" she cried, in great delight.

"Look," I said, and as I spoke I broke a sprout from a willow and tied her handkerchief to it so it streamed out like a tiny banner.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"That," said I, waving it in the breeze—"that, Sweet Charity, is a flag of truce. Is it declared?"

"Yes," she said, and I kissed her hand to seal it.

CHAPTER X

A DINNER-PARTY, WITH A QUARREL FOR DESERT

WE were almost at the gate, the gay talk and laughter going on within the wall seeming to indicate that my presence had not been altogether indispensable, before my companion evinced any lack of confidence in my ability to keep my promise.

"I really cannot break my word," she said, dropping her hand from my arm.

"Do you think I intend to break mine?" I asked, as though hurt by her apparent suspicion.

"No-o, but I do not see—"

"It is quite unnecessary that you should. Women are so—"

Mistress Charity flapped the banner she had insisted on carrying in my face.

"A truce has been entered upon," she reminded.

"Quite so. Now, if you will have the kindness to wait here for a moment—"

"You promise to come back?" she asked, anxiously.

I had to laugh that such a suspicion should enter her head.

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"Are you usually so badly treated by your admirers?" I asked.

"But you are not—"

I interrupted her again.

"Like the others? I take that as a compliment."

"You take everything just as you like, without worrying about what was intended," pouted she.

"Pardon me," I said. "I *never* take what is not intended for me."

"Of all the conceited fellows—"

"Remember the flag," said I, warningly pointing to the emblem of peace above us.

"How long must I wait?" she asked, flaunting it in the air.

"Only a moment."

As I answered her I strode up to the gate.

CAPTAIN WEATHERBY RESUMES THE NARRATIVE

The striking of the clock recalled to Sir Hillary's mind that if he would not be late at the palace he had no time to lose, so, throwing down my pen, he wrapped his cloak about him and hastened on his way, leaving me to continue the narrative. While I hardly consider his contributions to this tale to be in keeping with the general tone of my own writings, I think that I will permit them to retain their position uncorrected, though I feel in justice to myself that the responsibility for their authorship should not be borne by me, hence this explanation.

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The sudden appearance of Sir Hillary in another costume, the second newest in his wardrobe, was to me most surprising, for I had imagined him still mischief-making with Mistress Holliston on the highway, though I had seen no trace of either of them when I went to the gate in answer to the rapping of the old crone. That some accident had befallen my ward was quite evident, but, as he seemed most anxious to avoid explanation I held my peace, and, joining the others as he passed out to the road, had the misfortune to fall into the clutches of that interminable gabbler, Mistress Banthorpe; so my relief can readily be imagined when Sir Hillary soon returned and demanded the attention of his guests.

"Friends," he cried, "a happy thought. I had been wondering for the last hour what kept us from the pleasure of Mistress Holliston's attendance at our frolic to-day."

"Does he know her?" said Lady Kitty to me, in surprise.

"Certainly," I answered, stoutly, resolved that the lad should not fail in his new game, whatever it might be, for lack of a cheerful liar to aid him.

"But the mystery of her absence is solved, for I chanced to catch sight of her as she passed on the road just now. Her father—Lord forgive him—thinks me ill company for a decent lass, and so has forbidden her to set foot in my park."

"The scurvy knave," I shouted.

"It seems," went on Sir Hillary, "that the aged gentleman believes me to be only too apt a scholar

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for my guardian's instruction, and, as the result of his teachings, a graceless lackwit; but surely it would be a shame for us to lose the presence of so lovely a lady at our feast because Heaven saw fit to send me, in my babyhood, a quarrelsome old rake for a protector instead of a minister of the gospel; therefore, since Mistress Charity *cannot* dine *in* the park, and we *can* dine *outside* it as well as not, I propose that we adjourn to the turf at the road-side and continue our session there, as so doing will secure for us her charming company."

"Hear! Hear!" I bawled, lustily, drowning Lady Kitty's remarks on the subject.

Seeing no sign of demur from any one, for Lady Kitty, quickly realizing that her protest would be construed as a sign of her inability to combat the charms of the Puritan maid, did not repeat her objections, Sir Hillary ordered the servants to carry the table and chairs out on the grass by the highway, where we quickly preceded them.

"Good-day, Mistress Charity," said I, squeezing her little hand in my rough paw. "This is an unlooked-for honor."

"Hush, sir," she whispered, "or they will know my invitation was an afterthought."

As she spoke I saw her eye fall on Sir Hillary, whose arm had been taken possession of by Lady Kitty, and it seemed to me a look of displeasure came over her face.

"Pooh!" said I to her, softly. "There is small cause for worriment there. Sir Hillary is no patron

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of the Arts, and sees but little beauty in a blush that knows scant change but that of soap and water."

"You presume almost as greatly as your ward," she answered, haughtily enough; but as she turned to gossip with Squire Toby Armstrong she favored me with a sly wink, which I interpreted as I thought fit. A moment's investigation proved that Mistress Charity was already acquainted with our other guests, so, when the table was placed on the turf near the wall, we sat down to the feast without more ado. Sir Hillary, craftily eluding Lady Kitty's attempts to monopolize him, foisted that patched and painted beauty on me, and led Mistress Holliston on his arm to the seat of honor at his right. On his left hand sat Lady Kitty, in a rage so furious that she scarcely refrained from an open exhibition of her anger at being supplanted in her host's favor by an already oft-encountered rival, and I, of course, came next. Across the table was Master Peter Perkins, whose fame as a rhymer even now was becoming bruited abroad, while between him and Sir Humphrey Berkeley sat Mistress Nancy Hopton, only daughter of the Sir Ralph who had fought so bravely in the last war. At my side Squire Toby Armstrong, a mighty sportsman and rider to hounds, sought entertainment from brown-eyed Mistress Chudleigh; and, lastly, Sir Timothy Topleigh, libertine, drunkard, and sparkling wit, hopefully resigned to the tender attention of Mistress Banthorpe, completed the circle.

"Will Captain Weatherby have the kindness to say Grace?" asked Sir Hillary, solemnly.

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"Say it yourself," said I, indignantly, for it was no more in my line than his.

"But," he objected, "it is the opinion of our fair guest's father that I am *graceless*, and surely it would be most unseemly for me to prove him guilty of prevarication before his daughter."

"Shall I say Grace?" asked Sir Timothy, with a wicked glint in his eye.

"If you will be so kind," answered Sir Hillary, politely.

"Then here goes," said the already half-intoxicated young buck, rising unsteadily in his place. "*Grace*. Now I have said it, let's get to work."

Sir Timothy sat down, partly on Mistress Banthorpe, with a chorus of approval ringing in his ears, for his method had much to commend it to the gay and lively, though hardly up to the requirements of the truly religious. The dinner, thus aptly begun, proceeded merrily enough until the point was reached where we were all willing to listen to whatever any one had to say, providing that person had no objection to everybody else talking at the same moment; and, after an immense amount of chatter and gabble, I decided that the proper time had arrived for the delivery of an address, previously prepared and committed to memory several days before, so I rose to my feet.

At once the party broke into rapturous hand-clapping, as is usual at such gay assemblages.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I began.

There was a general chorus of "Hear! Hear!"

A DINNER-PARTY

under cover of which I refreshed myself with a swallow of claret.

"As our young friend and host, Sir Hillary Grenville—"

Every one applauded wildly, while the recipient of this demonstration of popular favor laughed.

—"has completed another year without serious accident to either head or heart, I think we should formally evince our wonder at his immunity—"

"Munimity sis good," chuckled Sir Timothy, with a hiccough hyphenating his remarks.

—"from his just deserts, matrimonial and otherwise, which he has so far enjoyed, by drinking his health in sincerest congratulation."

As I spoke I raised my glass, but finding it empty, confiscated that of Lady Kitty for the general good, much to that lady's indignation.

"To Sir Hillary Grenville, the most hare-brained young rascal in Devonshire, many happy returns of the day," said I.

Hillary rose blithely at the end of the table in reply to the clamor which followed this toast, and I solemnly pledge my word that the boy never looked handsomer.

"Friends," he began, "my sweet temper and ever-enduring desire to please prevent my assuming a pretence of modesty such as I am confident is usual and therefore proper at such a moment as this, for that would necessitate an attempt to avoid responding to your demands."

"Oh, lud!" said Lady Kitty. "He has it all by rote."

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"You wrong me," said Sir Hillary, not at all annoyed by her jealousy-inspired interruption, while Charity smiled with provoking sweetness at the irate young lady. "But to continue—"

"Hear, hear!" ejaculated Sir Timothy, waving his wine-glass in a manner that threatened immediate ruination to Mistress Banthorpe's green gown. I prayed that he might accomplish the undertaking, but to my sincere disappointment he subsided without doing any damage, as Sir Hillary went on:

"I understand perfectly that a regard for the conventional would necessitate a feeling of embarrassment at this, I may say—"

"Proudest moment of your life," suggested Sir Timothy. "They all say it, Hillary."

"Thank you, but I regret to state that never having been bashful in my whole career, I feel that I could not consistently be possessed—I should say *afflicted*—with such a virtue at so short a notice. Furthermore, had I been dumb as an oyster until the happy moment when I arose to find myself confronted by such an array of feminine charms, I am certain that a sight so delicious, nay, alluring, would have been sufficient to inspire me with almost classic eloquence. Ladies, believe me, I beg, I have loved you all at various times. No doubt I shall continue to do so—"

At this point hearty applause from the damsels so addressed compelled a brief pause.

"I am delighted to see that you would have me believe the idea as pleasing to you as to me, though,

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alas! I fear you but seek to fill me with fond hopes never to be realized. In the past I have occasionally had cold water thrown on my advances—”

(Here he looked at Charity, who appeared as though about to choke with laughter.)

—“but as such treatment merely makes more firm my determination—”

(Mistress Charity looked very grave at this.)

—“I cannot truthfully state that it has really made any difference in my sentiments. Ladies, we can never live with you or without you—at least, so I am told by my guardian—”

At this base betrayal of sacred confidence I immediately became the target for disapproving glances from all the women present, and therefore sought refuge behind my napkin, while Sir Hillary continued:

“So existence on an earth tenanted by females can never become either wholly happy or entirely tedious. With this comforting conclusion, I will end my trespass on your attention; accepting your congratulations with thanks and becoming humility, I have only to add that it is in my opinion an excellent moment to open a few more bottles.”

So saying, the young baronet sat down only to rise and bow his appreciation of the enthusiastic reception accorded his maiden effort as a speech-maker, while his guests, Sir Timothy in particular, bestirred themselves to follow his advice. Mistress Charity took a piece of parsley and a radish, bound them together with a thread pulled from Sir Hil-

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lary's torn ruffle, and pinned the resulting nosegay on the lapel of her host's coat; then, as the young gentleman gratefully kissed her hand, she said, meanwhile kicking her foot in my direction beneath the table:

"Sir Hillary, that was a truly noble oration. You should be in Parliament, I am sure."

"When ladies are made members I will join," he responded, promptly.

"So shall I," said she. "We will sit together, won't we, Sir Hillary? How jolly!"

Now, unfortunately the nudge of her foot which she had intended for me had been accidentally bestowed upon no less a person than Lady Kitty, who, flushed with anger, thus throwing into bold relief the rouge plentifully spread upon her really pretty face. Her chance to discomfit Charity had come, and she took advantage of it in the most cunning manner conceivable.

"Your pardon, Master Perkins," she said, icily, to the sharp-featured poet across the table, "but I had much rather you would refrain from kicking my shin if it will cause you no great inconvenience."

"What!" cried Sir Timothy, now far gone in his wine, from the other side of Mistress Banthorpe. "Is my faith in Peter's good character ill-placed. Egad, Master Perkins, I blush for you. And so publicly, too! Fie, sir, fie!"

The young gentleman thus rudely twice rebuked was rendered quite speechless for a moment by the suddenness of this entirely unfounded accusation.

A DINNER-PARTY

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, in great confusion.

"Quite right, Master Peter," said the cause of all the mischief, with never a trace of guilt upon her dimpled face. "Love-taps should be administered in private, and yet I wonder that the lady favored with so delicate an attention should betray you thus cruelly."

"What is this?" said Sir Hillary, forcing back a smile and addressing Lady Kitty, meanwhile bestowing a severely disapproving glance on Master Perkins. "Am I to infer, Lady Kitty, that our rhymster has dared—"

"Not so," cried the victim of this misunderstanding. "The lady is entirely mistaken. On my honor, I never touched her."

Now was Lady Kitty's opportunity, and she made the most of it.

"Surely such a monstrous foot could belong to none but a man," she cried. "I much doubt if I will be able to walk to-morrow."

"Indeed, madam," said Mistress Charity, red with sudden embarrassment, "I have no such great possessions as you would have our friends believe."

"Was it you, then?" asked Lady Kitty, in polite surprise. "On my soul I thought it could be none other than Master Perkins from the size of the shoe, and yet I should have known *he* is not the person who would so forget his manners. Who did you think to favor with what you yourself term a love-tap? Captain Weatherby, perchance?"

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"Leaving that out of the question for the moment," replied Mistress Charity, angry that a rival should even temporarily hold the advantage, "I will wager a dozen pairs of fine lace mitts that your foot is larger than mine, and prove it by measurement here and now."

"A splendid idea," cried Sir Hillary, tickled at the drollery of Mistress Charity's proposition. "I'll give the prize myself. Come now, ladies, you shall all compete for it. I will back Mistress Holliston for a hundred guineas."

"Not so," answered Lady Kitty, fanning herself. "I am not so fond of showing my feet as you, Mistress Holliston."

"No doubt you have *great* reasons for not doing so," replied that young person, maliciously. "Besides, if one may judge from the pains you lavish on your cheeks, Lady Kitty, you would have but little time to spend on the suitable adornment of aught else."

"At least I know better than to attend a merry-making in such a frock as that you have hung upon you," hotly retorted the victim of this last scathing remark.

"I' faith you know better than to rely upon your charms of person unadorned," answered Mistress Charity, not a whit abashed.

"Egad, Lady Kitty," cried Sir Timothy, in great delight, "what say you to that?"

Lady Kitty rose to her feet that she might the better administer the blow which she no doubt

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thought would prove a fitting conclusion to the argument.

"And what manners could one expect from the low-bred chick of a king-killing brood of psalm-singers?" she sneered.

"At least," said Mistress Charity, "you admit our fighting qualities. If I mistake not, one Sir Christopher Larkin spent the time he could have devoted to his king's defence in currish hiding in the Low Countries."

At this last sally, the foundation of which was laid but too truthfully, Lady Kitty gripped a saucer, for she was much given to wildness when in her tantrums; but I was before her, and sat her down in her chair with a bump that was plainly audible.

"Hillary," I said, sternly, meanwhile restraining the angered damsel, "this has gone far enough. The days of bickering 'twixt Roundhead and Cavalier are now happily passed, and surely to set such sharp tongues at cut and thrust ill becomes such a gathering as ours. So far as I can see, the bout is an even one, therefore two such skilled opponents can well afford to call it a drawn battle. I drink to both their healths. 'The Rose and the Daffodil.' May they long ornament our shire."

Heaven be thanked, the rest of the company had the sense to stand up as one and drown the feminine spite of the two pretty maids in the red depths of our oldest claret.

"A song, Toby," cried Sir Hillary, as we settled back in our chairs, and for once in his life Squire

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Armstrong, feeling the awkwardness of the moment, waived his usual meed of urging, and poured out his fine bass in a rollicking hunting air that was long enough for the smoke of battle to be fully dispelled before he had finished; and though sharp glances were now and then shot back and forth across the table, neither of the disputatious damsels addressed the other again.

As the last notes of the song died away, Sir Timothy thrust back his chair, and, glass in hand, rose to his feet, where he managed to remain, thanks to the support afforded him by the table.

"His Celery," he began, thickly.

"Who, Sir Tim?" asked the young gentleman thus vegetably addressed, from the head of the table.

"Beg pardon; should have said Sir Grillery," said Sir Tim, attempting with but little success to correct himself. Then, as every one laughed, he looked around him in hurt astonishment.

"Why this unseem — unseemly merriment, Sir Grillery?" he demanded.

"Do you take me for an eating-house, Sir Tim?" asked the young baronet.

"What is your damned name, anyway?" inquired that worthy, hopelessly, as it dawned on him that he had twisted it.

"Let it go at that, you profane dog," responded his host, politely.

"Just as you please, sir. I would like to give a toast if there is no great objectshun."

"By all means, Sir Tim. Fire ahead."

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"I am no canon or any other dig-dignitary of the church, sir," objected Sir Timothy, waving an admonishing finger at his brother-baronet.

"Order," said Sir Hillary, rapping on the table with his knife, for Master Perkins was snickering audibly behind his napkin.

"A dev'lish good idea," observed Sir Timothy, misunderstanding the remark. "Waiter, bring me a doz' more bottles. I may be thirsty when I am through speakin'."

"You shall have as much as you want, Tim," said Sir Hillary, in a comforting tone.

"S'cuse me, Sir Billowy—"

"He is half-seas over," whispered our host.

—"but that is quite impos'bul. I máy have as much as I can hold, but as much as I want—? Oh, never!" continued the orator, with becoming gravity. "I propose toast—"

"Toast and tea, Sir Tim?" asked Mistress Charity, mischievously.

"Who ever heard of toast without a T? You had best con your spelling-book more closely, Mistress Charitable," said Sir Tim, in condemnatory tones, shaking his head.

"The toast?" I demanded.

"I drink to Drink," said he, almost soberly. "To Drink, the ultimate end of all honest men, s'help me."

There was a clatter of dissent and protest from the ladies, but this was quickly drowned by the riotous applause of the rest of us. Sir Timothy waited

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patiently for the din to cease, taking advantage of the opportunity thus offered to help himself to another gobletful.

"Men," he went on, "after a certain time of life either choose wives, poor fools, or take to wine-bibbing. If it be a lady who wins the fateful toss, it makes no partic'lar difference in the end, as sooner or later he is driven to drink by her."

Wild applause mingled with manifestations of feminine disapproval here interrupted him, and Sir Hillary was forced to rap loudly to obtain order.

"The end is always the same, b'leeve me, m'fren's. Then if all roads lead to Rome, why not skip lightly on the path of revelry alone instead of slinging a wife-stone of a mile—? Thas's wrong. A wife should be clubbed, not stoned. It is much better for her, b'leeve me; but as I was saying, why sling a mile-stone of a wife—got it now, by gad!—around your neck by matrimony? Eh? B'leeve me, it shows but little confidence in your fren's taste in wives if you get one of your own while theirs are handy, eh? To Drink—fren's—I drink to Drink, b'leeve me."

And with this last commendable sentiment Sir Timothy spilled half his wine down his beruffled neck, the other half over Mistress Banthorpe, and subsided to listen contentedly to the noisy endorsement accorded him by his brother-bloods.

"Humphrey," said Sir Hillary, when silence was at last obtained, "you are always a temperate dog. Hang me if I ever saw you in your cups. Come

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now, answer Sir Tim. Give us the other side of it."

"Nay, cousin; I have no mind for argument, much less to engage so redoubtable an antagonist as Sir Timothy."

"'Doubtable antag'nist is good," murmured the previous speaker. "'Spoutable antag'nist is 'stremely good, on m'honor, s'help me."

Meanwhile Sir Humphrey had risen from his seat, and was leaning gracefully on the back of his chair. He was a handsome fellow, though dark and sinister, with an almost stealthy way of casting his eyes about him, but in every word and gesture a gentleman and a man to be admired.

"I will gladly propose a toast," said he, "if I may be permitted to do so after I have warned our fair friends that it is not probable that it will prove more pleasing to them than the bachelor sentiment of our witty neighbor. In fact, I can but endorse his opinions."

"Fie, sir!" said Mistress Charity, "have we not been sufficiently abused already? I' faith, gallantry is conspicuously lacking in this assemblage."

"Not so, Mistress Charity. Surely one sundown can be profitably devoted to criticism, since the rest of the year will no doubt be spent, as those already passed, in abject prostration and humble worship?" put in Sir Hillary, who dearly loved to quarrel with the ladies. "Go on, Humphrey, by all means."

"Hear! hear!" remarked Sir Tim, emphasizing

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his words with a prodigious racket with an empty wine-bottle.

"Then I drink to Woman," said Humphrey, raising his glass high that the rays shot horizontally from the setting sun might fill it with ruby light. "To Woman. Dainty, delightful, deceitful, dangerous Woman. She fools us all from the King down to the veriest clown of the fields. I' faith, from her gentle graces and wanton witcheries no man is safe while breath of life yet fills his lungs. Young or old, handsome or ugly, good or bad, I drink to her and all her virtuous follies and foolish vices. Ever her slave, I love and I detest her. I bless her and curse her in the same breath, for as truly as I am the last of my line, she gives us life but to find amusement in its ruination. Ah, you would cry me down, mesdames? Then know I speak but the truth, for in regard to the King I need but recall the recent banishment of the Duke of Chesney from the court for supplanting his uncle in the favor of Lady Holbrook, and for the clod I quote the case of my own body-servant, whose wife has left him for love of the village tailor. And for the King, again, I tell you that not ten leagues from here, only a week ago, I saw his favorite, Lady Castlemaine, love-larking with a soldier of fortune at a wretched wayside inn, while at Whitehall no doubt his Majesty was fuming at her absence. To Woman, gentlemen, with all her damnable cruelties and adorable tenderness, the pride and the plague of our lives. Her health."

We rose and drank the toast heartily enough, but

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when that was done a moment's hush fell upon us, for Sir Humphrey's words were too evidently spoken in all sincerity to be treated and laughed off as a jest. Sir Hillary spoke up suddenly as the silence became awkward, for our guests of the gentler sex were in a great rage at the cruel rating they had received, and for once in their lives had not a word ready to turn to ridicule this sudden attack, as is their ordinary course of conduct in such matters.

"And yet I will be bound, Humphrey, bitter as you are, and as you no doubt have a right to be, even now there is one for whose favor you would give your life," he said.

"If that were her price, I answer, 'Yes,' cheerfully," said Humphrey.

This hardly put matters on a better footing, so, like a fool, I blurted out what Fortescue had told me that afternoon, and asked Humphrey to tell his tale of robbery for the company's pleasure. This he did, but with so ill a grace that I felt sure he would long bear me a grudge for betraying his discomfiture to our gathering, for his nature was both rancorous and spiteful; but having little reason *at this time* to dread his enmity, his evident displeasure did not worry me a particle.

In a few words he described his meeting with a masked rider bestriding a great black horse, who, clapping a huge pistol at his head, had forced him to hand over his watch and chain and all the cash he chanced to have on his person at the time.

The news of the arrival of such a redoubtable char-

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acter in our ordinarily humdrum neighborhood was received, as may be imagined, with great surprise, not unmixed with some little alarm, by all present.

"And yet," said Sir Humphrey, in conclusion, "I almost envy the lawless dog his cool impudence and courage."

"I deny the courage," interrupted Sir Hillary, who was now well flushed with wine.

"Deny what you like *here*," answered his cousin, calmly, "but, if you meet my acquaintance as I did last night, refuse him nothing or it will be the worse for you, I'll warrant."

"And why do you think him so brave?"

"You who deny my words should prove his cowardice," replied Sir Humphrey, suavely. "I am no faint-heart, and yet I was glad to pass unmolested after I had complied with this cut-purse's demands."

"Do not misunderstand me, cousin," Sir Hillary said. "You yielded only because the beast had the advantage. Is it not so?"

"It is true," admitted the other. "A pistol at one's head is much in your opponent's favor, truly."

"Then, since it was by no fair means he bested you, why object when I call him coward?"

"Think of the risk, Hillary. No coward he, surely?"

"And why not?" rattled on the young baronet. "The advantage is always theirs, and without it there is not a man-jack among them who would dare molest an honest gentleman. What gallantry or

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pluck does this rascal or any of his kidney show in the practice of his profession? What chance of defence is left the luckless wights he bids to stand and deliver? Now, while I would willingly accommodate any rascal who had sufficient courage to force me to fight him on equal terms for whatever he fancied that he would like to possess of my belongings, I see but little to admire in a rascal who would rid me of my own without even a chance for its defence. Pshaw, Humphrey! if to frighten helpless women and to rob them, to threaten unarmed postilions and reverend ministers of the church, or to clap a blunderbuss to the heads of defenceless travellers is proof of courage, then write Hillary Grenville down a coward from this day."

Sir Humphrey flushed angrily, but his voice was steady when he answered:

"And I still hold that, no matter what else you can say to the discredit of highwaymen, cowardice is not one of their failings."

"Pray, sir," returned my ward, "what degree of courage think you is necessary for the successful following of such a calling?"

"As much as is possessed by you and me together," said his cousin, coolly.

"Then, as I am a Grenville, you are wrong," cried Hillary. "To my knowledge and belief my courage is as bold as any gentleman's, and no more, yet I would not fear to pad it on the highway myself."

"What folly to make a brag you have no means

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of proving," said Sir Humphrey, with a palpable sneer.

"But I can prove it," retorted Hillary.

"How can you, sir?"

"Why, easily enough," answered my ward, "if you will trust to my word of honor."

Sir Humphrey laughed softly to himself, and yet while there was no offence in its tone, I detected a ring that sounded by no means friendly.

"Done," he said. "You will hunt for this prowler, Hillary?"

"Either he will leave this neighborhood or within a fortnight I shall have killed him or clapped him in limbo," answered the misguided youth, stoutly.

Suddenly I realized what all this meant. Heaven forgive me that I, partly in liquor as I was, should have let the discussion get this far without protest. Before I had uttered one word of objection the young hot-head, for whose safe keeping I still felt responsible, had sworn to hunt down and kill or capture the unfortunate man who was all that years of riotous living and law-breaking had left of his own father. The blood surged to my head as a full understanding of what this rash bargain might entail dawned upon me, and if ever a man was for a moment in urgent need of a skilled bleeding, I was that fellow. Lady Kitty gave a cry of alarm, for my face, as I afterwards was informed, had turned an ugly purple.

"The man has a stroke!" she exclaimed.

"What, Guardy? Are you ill?" cried my ward,

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bending over me and loosening my collar. The Squire gave me a glass of water to drink, and in a thrice I had recovered.

"Ill?" I growled. "What decent man could listen unmoved to your infernal nonsense? You who would go thief-catching like a common constable. Faugh! You are a fool!"

"Surely it is a gallant adventure," said the boy, with a laugh; for now that he knew no harm had come to me, he cared not a jot for any words of caution I might waste upon him.

"Gallant Tophet," I answered. "Come, make null this foolish compact. Leave this lawless dog to the authorities and keep to your own affairs, lad."

I think I might have obtained my wish in the matter if Sir Humphrey had remained silent, but he, cunning blade that he was, knew only too well how to render my efforts of no avail.

"Of course," he said, with a scornful smile on his firm lips, "if it chances that the lad is afraid to undertake what he himself, entirely unsolicited, has offered to do, I release him from his promise."

Humphrey was well aware that Sir Hillary was not the man to draw back from any enterprise where such an action could possibly be construed as the result of timidity. From his subsequent actions I can now see that he hoped to remove by the fight that would surely follow the meeting of father and son as thief and thief-taker on the highway the only life that stood between him and the land and hall of Grenville Manor. Thank Heaven, his hopes were not

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realized, but the telling of that must wait until it comes into my story in its proper place.

"I will not withdraw my offer," said Sir Hillary. "The bargain is made, cousin."

"As you like," said Humphrey, carelessly; but there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he sank back in the chair from which he had risen during the controversy.

Before I could interpose further objection, a tall, white-haired old gentleman, clad all in black, came into view on the highway.

"Oh, dear!" said Mistress Charity, catching sight of him. "It is my father come in search of me."

"Hide under the table," advised Mistress Hopton. "As yet he has not seen you."

"No," answered the little maid; "I will take my punishment. It would be a coward's part to evade it."

"Come, then," said Sir Hillary. "We will make the best of it. Lads, we will drink her health before him to show how we love and admire her. The compliment may mitigate his disapproval. Bumpers all."

Master Holliston paused in astonishment as he perceived for the first time our gay array ornamenting the road-side, and for a moment he did not see Mistress Charity, who was seated in such a position that her face was partly turned from him.

At Sir Hillary's signal we all rose to our feet, save for the little Puritan maid, and faced him, glass in hand.

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"To the health of Mistress Holliston!" cried the gay young blade at the head of the table. "To the Rose of Devon, now in blossom! Long may she bloom!"

We echoed the toast as the new-comer gave a great start of surprise. Then, as his daughter rose from her seat and courtesied her thanks, his eyes flashed with anger.

"What!" he exclaimed, in a trembling voice. "My daughter in such riotous company? I can scarce believe my eyes. Charity, what does this mean?"

Before she could answer, Sir Hillary advanced and bowed most politely to the angry old man.

"Sir," said he, "let me assure you the fault is mine."

"Sir Hillary, I believe? I might have known that such graceless doings owed their existence to you, sir."

"You flatter me, Master Holliston," replied Sir Hillary. "Sanguine as my nature is, sir, I scarce hoped that my capacity for mischief-making would ever receive such unqualified recognition as that you have just now accorded it."

While this remark was hardly of an entirely propitiatory nature, the quarrel that followed might have been avoided had Sir Timothy not suddenly and unfortunately decided to assume charge of the affair.

"Old boy," he said, flapping his napkin skittishly at the aged Puritan, "have a noggin? Egad! if you will it so, I will fill you up to your hair with good

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liquor, and drink with you glass for glass myself, s'help me!"

"Drunken impertinent," answered Master Holliston, sternly, I—"

"Then if you won't drink, have a bun, old Cock-o'-the-Walk," hiccoughed Sir Tim; and, in spite of my efforts to prevent him, he tossed a sweet-cake at the old man.

"For shame, Sir Timothy!" cried Hillary. "Good sir, I trust—"

"Hush your irreverent tongue!" roared Master Holliston, his naturally high temper breaking from restraint. "As for you, you curled and scented popinjay, it is such as you who have brought a foul disgrace on England."

"You surprise me," said Sir Tim; and with that he pulled the bouquet from the centre-piece and flung it straight at Master Holliston's head, nearly upsetting the table as a result.

Quick as Sir Tim had been to resent what he considered an insult, Hillary was even quicker, and he caught the great nosegay as it flew through the air in the direction of the old man.

"Forgive him, sir," he said to Master Holliston. "The lad is drunk. I warrant you to-morrow will find him heartily sorry for his behavior."

"Pretty company for my daughter," began the enraged old Puritan.

"Hush, father, I implore!" cried Charity, seizing him by the arm. "The fault is mine, sir, but let us go. I am quite ready."

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"You are right," replied Master Holliston, calming himself with an effort. "I will hold my tongue. Come, girl, this is no place for God-fearing folk."

Sir Timothy had sunk back in his chair, thanks to my restraining grip.

"Curse him!" he spluttered. "I'll have his life!"

"No, no," I remonstrated. Spare him, Tim, like a good lad."

As the couple moved up the road together, the spite which had been gathering for the last hour in Lady Kitty's heart burst forth.

"Take her home and trounce her soundly!" she cried, jeeringly. "I' faith I would love to cut the rods for you to whack her, as I have no doubt you intend doing!"

Holliston turned and looked at her sternly.

"Peace, woman," he said, for he was never a man to brook interference from a petticoat.

But Lady Kitty only laughed the louder.

"What a pretty old gentleman it is!" she tittered. "Oh, the dear! I have half a mind to kiss him."

"Where is your gallantry?" stammered Sir Timothy. "For shame, old psalm-singer, or do you prefer to squeeze the serving-wench behind the pantry door?"

In spite of Charity's efforts to lead from the spot, Master Holliston moved back a pace or two that he might be more easily heard.

"To think," he cried, "that the Commonwealth has sunk to this!"

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"Risen, sir, risen," corrected Sir Timothy, very pleasantly.

"In Cromwell's day you would have been laid by the heels in jail for such shameless ribaldry. Ah! What can be expected when a libertine and drunkard sits on the throne of England?"

Sir Hillary, who, seeing he could do nothing to help matters, had remained silent until now, raised his hand in protest.

"This is treason, sir," he said, gently.

"Then make the most of it," retorted the infuriated old man. "In my day, treason to Debauchery was known as Virtue."

Thinking Sir Tim was now to be trusted, I advanced to where Sir Hillary was standing. Unfortunately this was exactly what Sir Timothy had been waiting for, and as I reached the side of my ward, he seized a glass of wine from the table, and holding it up with a derisive gesture towards Master Holliston, cried:

"To Master Merciful Holliston, Lord High Protector of the Public Morals and Traitor-in-Ordinary."

Like a flash the elder man had reached the table.

"You wretched puppy!" he hissed, and as he spoke he slapped the drunken young buck full in the face.

Sir Timothy drew his sword, but Master Perkins and the Squire, hitherto laughing spectators of the exciting scene, seized him and held him in spite of his struggles, or murder would have been done, as

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the lad for the moment was raving mad and Master Holliston had no weapon.

"I shall kill you for that blow!" cried Sir Timothy, foaming at the mouth in his passion.

"No, Tim, the fault was yours," said Sir Hillary, pulling Master Holliston from the spot. "Come, sir," he added, in a lower tone. "The boy may have a pistol. Get you gone, I beg of you, if you have any love for your daughter."

Without another word the old man turned and strode up the highway, and, while I rejoined the group at the table, Sir Hillary escorted Mistress Charity, half smiling, half in tears, in the direction taken by Master Holliston.

Sir Hillary walked beside her to her father's gate, with many apologies, but she would have none of them, for she blamed only herself in the matter. The house was set quite a little distance back from the road, but the girl bade him leave her there lest the anger of Master Holliston be still more aroused.

"And we are friends now?" Sir Hillary asked, anxiously, as he took her hand in parting.

"Can you doubt it?" she said, softly.

"Then," whispered the lad, as he pressed her fingers to his lips, "'Sweet Charity begin at home'—to love me."

"Must I begin *again*?" she answered, turning away.

In a moment he was alone, and though all the land was now wrapped in the gray shadows of the gloaming, the world for him had never before been so filled with sunshine.

CHAPTER XI

SIR HILLARY GRENVILLE TURNS NIGHT PROWLER

SIR HILLARY and I were at supper in the great dining-room of Grenville Hall.

The day waned slowly and sullenly, angry that the grain-fields and meadow-lands should obtain a brief respite from the scorching sunshine in the comforting gloom of the summer evening. The turf on the lawn, where no trees spread leafy shelter to keep the tender grass from the parching fury of the heat, lay baked and juiceless, eagerly awaiting the coming darkness, damp and laden with balmy odors of the night. Slowly and surely the shadows swept over the land; the sun, barred back by the distant hills, sank out of sight, and the sweet, softly refreshing breeze that began to rustle among the trees seemed like a sigh of relief from the breast of Nature.

"A devilish hot day," observed Sir Hillary, as he handed me my churchwarden, at the same time shoving the bowl of tobacco weed towards me.

"Do you think this is news?" I asked, filling my pipe, for even now my forehead was beaded with perspiration.

"Did you ever see such eyes?"

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He put this question, apparently not having heard my remark. I looked at him suspiciously. He, for once in his life, wore on his face a decently serious expression, which was more than enough to occasion me surprise.

"Never," I answered, chuckling. "If I have, beshrew me!"

"And her mouth," continued Sir Hillary. "Did you notice that?"

"Surely," said I, leading him on. "A woman's mouth is always noticeable."

Sir Hillary sighed, and crossed one leg over the other.

"Did you ever think of getting married, Guardy?" he asked.

"A number of times, lad, but good-luck always prevented me. Truly, were I a praying man, I would have much to give thanks for, as in my days I have seen many a captivating damsel and yet have come through to a ripe middle age, undistressed and without a drawback, wrapped up in a petticoat and other things, to hang on me."

"You are glad that you are a bachelor?"

"Did you ever meet a man of my years so blest that was not?" I answered, puffing up a great cloud of smoke and wondering what the lad was after.

"It's a queer world."

"So other men have stated, my boy."

"Many an old spinster marries, though, as you say, few elderly bachelors seem inclined to give up their liberty," he went on.

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"Men and women look at marriage in different lights," said I, "which accounts for that."

"How so, Guardy?" asked the lad.

"Men marry when they have a reason; women when they have an excuse. Then, again, you must remember that while men are necessary to the happiness of women, women are no more necessary to the happiness of men than happiness is necessary to a woman if she can have a man instead."

"Bravo!" cried Sir Hillary, in great delight. "The coffee-houses of London have missed their brightest star, Guardy. Egad! the shire shall hear that sentiment of yours, or I am no gossip!"

I attempted to appear unconcerned, as becomes a man to do after saying a good thing, lest the hearers gain the idea that such is an event rather than a daily occurrence, but I fear I made rather a sorry job of it, for I certainly felt a trifle puffed up at Hillary's praise, as the lad had a biting wit of his own, which at times seems marvellous even now when I look back at the old days. What followed immediately afterwards tinged the lad's admiration with a slight coloring of diplomacy—at least so it appeared in my mind at the time, though perhaps I wronged him.

"Master Holliston is his daughter's guardian, is he not?" he asked, in what he plainly intended should be a careless manner.

"At all events he so imagines," I answered, beginning to smell a rat.

"Then," said Sir Hillary, watching me out of

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the tail of his eyes, "if I wished to ask for her hand in marriage, it would be highly proper for you, my guardian, to approach him on the subject, eh?"

"Not much," I replied, with emphasis. "You are over twenty-one."

"Well, so are you," he said, in an aggrieved tone.

"But I do not wish to marry Mistress Charity," said I. "And if I did, I would not waste much time dilly-dallying with her father. In my day the young bucks were made of different stuff."

"Go to the deuce!" said Sir Hillary.

"Anywhere but to Master Holliston's," I replied, laughing at his discomfiture. "By-the-way, have you seen the young lady since her father broke up our dinner-party?"

"Three times," he said, coolly, helping himself to a pipe.

As but two days had passed since he made the girl's acquaintance, this seemed to me to be doing very well.

"How does she treat you?"

"You would not know her for the same maid," he answered, sourly.

"Egad! surely she is not worse behaved? No, I will not believe it!" I cried, raising my hand in protest.

"You fool!" responded he, with scant politeness. "She carries her head so high I know not how to take it."

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"The lip is my favorite spot," I observed, "but if she tilts her chin too high for that, the bend of her throat has its advantages."

He scowled at me so fiercely that I relapsed into silence.

"She gives herself the airs of a queen," he complained. "Such coyness I have never before encountered."

"She has to make up for her boldness of the first day," I suggested, comfortingly.

"Women are strange creatures," he remarked, sighing as though this philosophical conclusion had cost him much mental exertion. I wonder if there has ever existed a man who has not at some time or other given voice to these self-same words?

"I will not deny that," said I, promptly.

"Who asked you to deny it?" Sir Hillary demanded in a rage, and shoving back his chair he stalked out of the door onto the porch.

"Jock, saddle the bay nag," I heard him say to the hostler, who at this moment chanced to pass.

Evidently he intended to do some night-riding, so I rose quickly and stepped out beside him in a sudden panic, as I remembered his bargain with Humphrey Berkely.

"Surely—" I began, but he interrupted me at once, divining what I would say.

"As well to-night as any other," he said. "To tell the truth, I am in a rare mood for adventure. Heaven send the old cut-purse my way before I get into a better temper, and I will answer for it that

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his night plundering on the public road will meet with a sudden end."

"You are resolved to go on with this silly business?" I asked, mentally cursing the reckless folly of youth.

"Did you think I had forgotten it?" he demanded, indignantly.

"I hoped that sober thought would show you the utter idiocy of the whole proceeding."

"It is not the first foolish thing that I have done," he answered, looking at me calmly.

"But it may be the *last*," said I, for I scarce dared think of what might happen if he met Carleycroft while the latter was transacting business on the road. Of the latter's mettle I had had much opportunity to judge in the days of our youth, and I knew better than to believe that the moral ruin which had overtaken him had rendered his courage less bold, while the cool, calm bravery of my ward was more than once proven before my eyes, both in his boyhood and since he had arrived at man's estate.

"What does Mistress Holliston say on the subject?"

"She begged me not to undertake it," said Hilary, thrashing his foot with his riding-whip.

"And you refused to comply with her request?" I asked, in surprise. "You are not usually so ungallant."

"She but made me more resolved. It seems that Humphrey bade her have no fear, for I, so he said, had no intention of carrying out our agreement."

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"Has he pretensions to her favor?"

"It certainly looks so, Guardy. I can readily understand it, for, as you know, his ambition is to buy back or in some other manner to obtain possession of the old hall his gambler of a father sold to Master Holliston. What way is easier than to marry Charity and then wait for old age to carry off the present owner?"

"True enough," I said, pausing to take a long whiff of smoke before continuing. "But that is not his one chance of wealth."

"Speak out," said Sir Hillary, impatiently. "What do you mean?"

"As next of kin, though far enough removed at that, he is heir to this property. If you meet with your just deserts for concerning yourself with this night-rider, all these beautiful acres, together with the old hall, will become his. Gad's life! I half believe he deliberately trapped you into the promise in hope that you might get a finishing pill from this highwayman. Come, come, lad! Give up the idea. Your courage has been too often tried to need such proof as this enterprise will give it. Let Humphrey talk if he wishes to."

"Not I," he answered, doggedly. "What would she think of me if I did not keep my word?"

"What will she think of you if you are found on the road-side with your brains spread over the grass near by?"

"It is cursed little she would care about that," said he, in a savage tone.

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I whistled softly to myself. So it had come to this stage already? The coquetry of Mistress Charity had so exasperated him that he was now more than ever determined to carry through this desperate adventure, no doubt thinking to impress her with his daring and courage. It has ever been thus since maids and lads were first created. Show me a man with everything that good sense can ask in the way of belongings and surroundings rushing madly into danger, and I will show you some flouting, pouting damsel who is accumulating a large store of pre-nuptial triumph to draw upon in the ensuing years of marital subjugation and matronly dignity. A kiss refused or a too melting glance at another swain, and—pop!—into the army he goes or on shipboard, in sullen fury, resolved to become a hero and return laden down with glory to scorn the offending maid in later years. In reality, to add to England's renown on land and sea; to meet death, or to return home mangled, or with the sadness of experience on his brow, only to encounter his old love's tiny son or daughter schoolward bound, or to hear the church-bells ring out the chimes of her wedding with some spark who in former days was scarce a marker to him in her favor. Alas, it will be so always! The smiles and kisses go to the men near at hand, for the gentle dames are well aware that the supply still remaining will more than suffice for all the endearments needed when the absent gallants return, if the fair ones choose to wait until that day, which is seldom the case. Truly, women are the Devil!

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"Well, even so," I urged. "What do you care what she thinks? You lived a year with her in the same neighborhood and lost no sleep of nights worrying about her opinions, and yet now, egad! at two days' notice, you must needs leap into danger because she coquettes with you."

"Precious little you know about such things," he retorted, angrily. "A promise is a promise, and because I happen to become acquainted with a pretty girl you jump at the conclusion that she is considered in the matter."

As Sir Hillary had just admitted that she was largely concerned in the affair, this remark may seem a trifle unreasonable, but as a mood of chronic contradiction is usually characteristic of young blades undergoing their first love-sickness, in reality his bad temper and contrary tongue were only to be expected.

"Well," said I. "You shall have my company, then."

He was not at all grateful for my offer. In fact, I believe, if circumstances had so far indulged him as to throw Mistress Charity aglow with love into his arms in his present temper he would have regarded her with stern suspicion, and probably rebuked her severely as well. Truly there is only one thing more cross-grained and incomprehensible than a man in love—and that is a maiden similarly afflicted.

"I need a nurse," he jeered. "Why not fetch the dairy-maids for my protection? A pretty plight I'd be in if my cousin met you with me. No. You

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will be kind enough to remain at home with your wisdom and your pipe, and if you behave particularly well, I will bring you one of this cut-purse's ears to wear for a love-charm when you go to woo Mistress Banthorpe."

I grew angry in my turn and cursed him roundly for an obstinate jackanapes, but he retorted that he had done his best, and, considering his bringing up, was by no means to be blamed for his various shortcomings. With this last gratuitous information, he swung up in the saddle on his bay stallion, and galloped off into the dusk. There was nothing left for me to do but follow his impertinent advice, so I sat smoking on the porch till midnight, with a cooling draught at my elbow, and then went to bed.

After taking this rude farewell of me, Hillary cantered down the highway for about a league and a half, then leaped his horse over a hedge, threaded his way through a field of rye, took a short-cut connecting the post-road with one less frequented, and bringing up on a cow-path that led to a tiny brook, trotted back and forth, meanwhile keeping a sharp lookout for the rising of the moon, an event due this night in the neighborhood of ten o'clock. I have often heard it said that a watched pot will not boil, but keeping an eye on the dawn or sunset has never in my experience materially interfered with the celerity of the proceeding, and after a while the starlight whitened and grew less noticeable as the moon rose slowly into sight. From this little lane

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a clear view of the highway for nearly a mile could be had, and it was for this reason that Sir Hillary took up his position here, wisely concluding that an earlier appearance on the road would subject him to the scrutiny of many of the farm-workers passing on their way to and from the Cock Robin Inn, and the now old and ramshackle hostelry that drew its name from the rude reproduction of the coat-of-arms of the House of Grenville painted on its weather-beaten sign. Since Mistress Killigrew's death, some fifteen years ago, this last-named tavern had steadily declined in public favor until now, under the management of old Toby, who for a decade had done duty as its former mistress's hostler, it had become the resort of the poorer and rougher element, and more than once I heard it whispered in the neighborhood that the Grenville Arms was well known as a snug hiding-place for light-fingered gentry when the country-side grew too hot for their comfort. A new and more pretentious place of public entertainment, built perhaps a mile farther along on the highway in the direction of Grenville Hall, had succeeded to and now wellnigh monopolized all the better class of custom, and it was to this I have alluded as the Cock Robin Inn, for such was the name it bore.

A coach rolled heavily and slowly along the highway. While still at a distance, Hillary recognized the ponderous vehicle as the property of old Sir Christopher Larkin, and his love of mischief as usual easily mastering him, he tied over his face a mask such as dancers love to wear, cantered back through

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the grain, and again leaping the hedge, drew rein under the shadow of a great oak to wait for the coming of Lady Kitty in her carriage.

Now while joking is often a merry way to pass an idle hour, but little good ever comes of mocking at and meddling with the law—at least such has been my experience, and I am inclined to think that my ward, looking back on this evening's pranks and the resulting consequences, will quite agree with me in the matter.

"Stop the coach!" commanded Sir Hillary, still keeping in the shadow, levelling his cocked pistol at the driver's bewigged head.

As the faithful servant promptly obeyed, Lady Kitty peered out of the window to ascertain the reason for the sudden halt. The tall figure on horse-back presented a decidedly forbidding aspect, so she immediately withdrew herself to the bottom of the carriage and screamed lustily.

With a threatening gesture at the coachman, Hillary rode up to the door of the vehicle, and, thrusting his head in the window, gruffly bade the frightened young lady to cease her noise, announcing at the same time that if she persisted in her racket, he would feel it his duty to shoot her driver. While this threat did not seem to particularly frighten Lady Kitty, doubtless because of the great number of servants eligible for the position of coachman, she stopped her screaming, and indignantly demanded what he wanted.

"Your rings, good lady, your diamond ear-rings.

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a certain pearl necklace, and one emerald breast-pin," responded the amateur cut-purse.

"You must have a list of my jewelry!" she cried, in surprise. Then, taking a second look at her tormentor, she burst out laughing.

"Hillary," she giggled, "if ever a man deserved a clouting, you are he. For shame, sir, to play such a trick on an old friend!"

Hillary, feeling a trifle foolish at the failure of his joke, removed his mask, thereby putting an end to the fears of the yokel on the box.

"Plague take it!" he said, ruefully. "How did you know me?"

"As though any one could mistake that waist and shoulders," said Lady Kitty, now in high feather. "When you next take toll on the highway, I advise you to make yourself a paunch of straw to hide the shape you are so proud of. Lud! you had me in a rare fright for a while."

And she sighed luxuriously in the enjoyment of her present safety. (I use the word *present* advisedly, and the reason for it will soon be made plain.)

"I marvel greatly that Humphrey did not recognize you when you halted him," she went on, gayly.

"But I did not halt him," said Sir Hillary, in surprise. "This is my first and last appearance as a Knight of the Road, for it is easy to see I am not cut out for the business."

"Then there really is a highwayman in the district?" she asked, in fresh alarm.

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"I sincerely hope so," said the lad, with a laugh. "I am in search of him now, and I have a little mind to follow a will-o'-the-wisp all night just to oblige Cousin Humphrey. Good-evening, my lady."

The carriage rumbled on as Sir Hillary trotted off in the opposite direction, but if Lady Kitty flattered herself that the dangers of the night were passed and done with, she was much mistaken. Before she had gone another mile, a gigantic masked figure, riding a black horse, halted her conveyance, pulled her out on the road with scant politeness, took possession of her jewelry, laughed at her protest at this second playing of such a shabby joke, and, in spite of her threats of complaint to one Captain Weatherby, galloped down the highway, leaving her, minus her valuables, to drive on, vowing vengeance on Sir Hillary and his silly, practical jokes, for that her despoiler was an entirely different individual never entered her little head. The bay nag of the young baronet in the gloom had looked as black as ink, the color of this last-comer's steed; the huge beaver slouched over Carleycroft's eyes effectually hid his gray locks, while the turned-up collar of his cloak concealed the absence of the long curls of my ward, and lastly, the height and breadth of the men were too much alike to be distinguished except when one was set beside the other; so, after all, her ladyship's mistake was not to be very greatly wondered at. The coachman, also, had never a doubt but that this second interruption was caused by the author of the first, and cursing Sir Hillary heartily for the two

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frights he had given him, he drove on, reaching home without further molestation.

Not quite a week had passed since the arrival of Jack Midnight in the neighborhood, and already the wondrous resemblance of father and son had begun its work of jugglery, which was to end in the near future so tragically for both. And quite unconscious of each other's existence, this worthy couple continued on their way with a scant half-league of post-road between them as they galloped

As Hillary neared the cross-roads where the highway was cut at right angles by a turnpike leading from the town of Exeter through a little wood to the neighboring village of Tiverton, he encountered no less a worthy than Captain Fortescue, gloriously drunk, going from side to side on the road like a ship in a head-wind. In spite of the liquor he had aboard, he saluted my ward politely, and then laboriously resumed his progress towards the barracks. This intoxicated warrior was so unfortunate as to meet Carleycroft about a mile farther on, and, deciding to demand an explanation of the method by which *Sir Hillary* had succeeded in passing him unobserved, endeavored to seize the horse's bridle, his effort being rewarded by a severe nip on his shoulder from the animal's great teeth, while the butt-end of a loaded riding-whip, whirled by the efficient hands of the highwayman, laid him senseless in the long grass ornamenting the road-side. When the early morning found him restored to consciousness, the events of the night just passed were so hazy and in-

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distinct that he was by no means certain that the whole affair was not a drunken dream, though quite at a loss how to explain the marks of teeth on his shoulder and the decidedly obtrusive swelling which ornamented the crown of his head.

Meanwhile Sir Hillary cantered along the highway at a good pace for another mile or two with no further adventures, and, turning, rode back in the direction he had come without meeting Carleycroft, who, quite satisfied with his night's haul, had already returned to his headquarters to seek slumber that was peaceful if not virtuous. Thus ended the evening which was destined to exert such a powerful influence upon the immediate futures of both father and son.

CHAPTER XII

SIR HILLARY ENTERTAINS

THOUGH Hillary's first attempt to win his wager with Sir Humphrey did not meet with success, I have but little doubt that he would have again sought the highwayman had the subsequent remarkable happenings not followed one upon another with such rapidity. As it proved, no further opportunity for night-prowling was afforded my ward, who almost immediately found himself involved in a maze of circumstances so strange and compromising that within a fortnight's time he became the hunted game of the law-abiding country-folk as an outlaw and fugitive, with one thousand pounds blood-money offered for his capture dead or alive. This, no doubt, will seem passing strange to the reader, but so it was destined to be; for, though under ordinary circumstances a joke is merely a laughing matter, sometimes a simple jest contains in its innermost kernel the essence of an appalling tragedy. Sir Hillary's frolic on the highway with Lady Kitty Larkin resulted most disastrously for the young joker, and so many and complicated were the events whose occurrence led up to and produced such an ex-

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traordinary state of affairs that I, to do full justice to the story, must prolong my narrative far beyond the limit I had set upon its length in my mind when I first took my pen to write.

To begin with, Sir Hillary, having by accident discovered that my birthday followed ten days after his, insisted upon giving a dance and supper in honor of the event, to which all the gentry of the surrounding country were invited. Grenville Hall, made gay and handsome by many cunning decorations and fanciful groupings of lights, never held a larger or more giddy pack of guests. At least fifty sat down to feast in our great dining-room, and following the example set them by my ward, who was ever an affectionate lad, made much of me. Then there was dancing and game-playing and love-making, and I doubt not some secret and love-laden kissing in quiet corners, besides that done in play, boldly before the company. Altogether, it was a merry evening, and one which I would have long remembered, even had certain strange incidents never taken place.

The dancing was still going on in a lively fashion, while in a corner of an adjoining room Hillary, his cousin Humphrey, and I were smoking and taking our ease. Mistress Holliston, to whom Hillary was now desperately attentive, in spite of the fact that his wooing found but little favor in the eyes of her father, had been invited; but though half of the evening was already gone, as yet had not appeared. The poor boy was in a sad state of mingled hope and disappointment, starting at every sound outside to fly

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to the window to make sure that her coach was not rumbling up the drive, only to return to his seat beside me with a curse or two at his own eagerness, all of which seemed to greatly amuse his cousin.

"What a hopeful youth it is!" remarked Sir Humphrey to me between puffs, for all three of us were smoking as though our lives depended on it.

"Truly," said I, wisely, "hope is the bubble that makes lively the wine of existence."

"A pretty saying, Captain. Really Master Perkins had best look to his laurels, eh, Hillary?"

"There be very few such gifted creatures as Guardy," responded my ward. Bless the boy! he always overvalued his old comrade's worth and ability, and sometimes in these years of my old age I wonder what of joy and peace life could have brought me had it not been my good fortune to have loved and guided to manhood's threshold the little son of my ill-fated friend.

"Do you still expect our pretty Puritan?" I asked.

"I have not given up hope yet," said the lad, looking at the clock.

"Surely her father will not permit her to come here after your difference of opinion on the roadside?" said Sir Humphrey, in surprise.

"Surely she won't ask him," replied Hillary, with a laugh. "Ah! I hear a carriage this moment."

Crossing the room, he threw open the window and leaned out.

"It is she!" he cried, in great delight.

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As he ran quickly out of the room, bent on meeting her on the steps, I took his place at the window. This was no false alarm. As I watched I saw Hillary throw open the door and extend his hand to assist her from the carriage. Instead of accepting it, she slapped him smartly on the palm with her fan, and, leaning out, whispered in his ear. What it was she said I must leave you to guess, for, without more ado, he bent over and into the carriage, and gripping her round the waist, lifted her out bodily and carried her from the clumsy vehicle across the few feet of intervening roadway, up the steps, and into the hall, while a fat old woman, whom I recognized as her nurse, Mistress Tabitha Titby, lumbered out of the coach as best she might, and followed in Hillary's wake, expostulating volubly.

"Hang me!" cried I, "the lad has picked her out of the carriage, and is lugging her into the house like a bag of meal."

"What!" said Humphrey, as though little pleased. "Not really, Captain?"

"But he is," said I, laughing at his sour face, as I shut and fastened the window, for a storm threatened, and the moon already was thickly veiled by clouds. I think he swore beneath his breath, but of this I am not certain.

"Hillary's assurance carries him too far," he said, rising from his chair with a frown.

"It's carried Mistress Holliston some little distance also," said I, meaning to anger him, for we were never over-friendly.

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Sir Humphrey looked at me savagely, then smiled with the nasty sneer that was so often on his lips.

"Ah, indeed?" he answered, politely. "Not *too far* for her father's peace of mind, I hope."

And with this snarl he walked in among the dancers, and found business there to divert him. I resolved not to repeat his words, for I knew that Sir Hillary would put up with no such impudence even from his cousin, and the next moment in came my ward, still carrying Mistress Holliston. Nor can I blame him for being loath to put her down, as she was a delicious armful in her soft *fol-de-lols* and *what-the-devil-do-you-call-'ems* decked out for the dancing.

"Boy or girl, nurse?" said I, looking down at her indignant face haloed round by her rumpled hair.

"A boy," quoth he. "On my honor, a boy, a *tom-boy*, or I know not the meaning of the word!"

"Put me down, sir! I bade you place me on the steps, so that I might gain the hall without touching foot to ground, but switch me if I asked for a ride over half the shire!" she cried, indignantly.

"In good time, mistress. I've worn half my heart out waiting for your coming, and I hold you now but to make certain you are here," said Hillary, with a laugh; for to a man of his strength the weight of the little lass was like a feather.

Then, as she pinched him sharply on the ear, he calmly placed her on the great oak book-table, where she stood shaking out her crumpled finery in a fine stew of anger and amusement.

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"A gallant youth," I said, deciding to help on the trouble. "He places his lady on a pedestal."

"His lady!" she cried, scornfully, as old Tabitha, who had been fairly distanced on the stairs, came wheezing in. "His lady! Since when, Master Old Bachelor?"

"Have you deceived me?" I sternly demanded of my ward. "What did you tell me but half an hour ago?"

The boy was not a whit abashed.

"Heed him not, Mistress Charity," he said, laughing, for, now that she had come, his happiness needed little more to be complete. "Too much wine makes strange work with some men."

She was not to be thus enlisted on his side after her unceremonious reception.

"If any one of we four present has had too much," she said, quickly, "it is not Captain Weatherby."

"Not Tabby, surely?" began my ward, in a shocked tone.

"Tabitha, pert sir," said the old dame, severely. "Where are your manners, Sir Hillary? Never saw I such barefaced impudence."

"Shall I grow a beard, Tabby?"

"For what, lad?" said I, in surprise.

"That my impudence might be whiskered," replied the young wit, with a roar of laughter.

Charity giggled on her elevation in spite of herself.

"Gad Zooks!" said she, bravely as a trooper, looking down from her perch on the young baronet both

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figuratively and literally. "I greatly doubt if you could raise a mustache, much less a beard."

"I am not so sure of that," he answered, looking at Tabitha with an interested air. "When I see what your nurse can accomplish in that line, I feel hope grow within me."

Tabitha rose haughtily from the chair where she had sought with none too much success to recover her lost wind.

"Young sir," said she, "your tongue is over-long. A whacking would much improve your manners; and were I five years younger you should not for another moment suffer from the lack of it. I told you, Mistress Charity, we did wrong to come here even if your father is away this evening. With such lawless young blades in the neighborhood we are lucky indeed if we be not murdered in our beds."

"Then you intend to remain all night, Tabby?" said Sir Hillary, winking at me.

"*Tabitha*, sir. Mercy on me! No. What a question! How dare you, sir? Come, Charity, let us go at once. Never in my life have I met such an impudent blatherskite."

"But how can I come?" cried the girl, helplessly. "It is too high to jump from with such heels as I have on to-night, and I see no other proper way to get down."

"I will get you a chair," said the old dame.

"If you do, Tabby—"

"*Tabitha*, pert sir," she corrected, shrilly.

"*Tabitha*, if you do, I will put you on the mantel-

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piece with the other flowers," said Hillary, making as though to seize the old maid, who promptly sat down on the chair with a squeal of alarm and gripped tightly the arms for fear of being plucked bodily from it.

Truly he was in high spirits and reckless too, for he went over behind Tabitha's chair, and, before she could move or divine what purpose he had in view, kissed her on the mouth.

"There," said he, escaping the box she aimed at his ear. "A kiss for a hard word is a good rule the world over. I' faith, Tabby—*Tabitha*—I'm monstrous fond of you indeed, and I know you would not break my heart by deserting Guardy's merry-making in a huff. Stay, and Guardy shall kiss you himself."

"Lord preserve us!" cried Tabitha, mightily pleased at what the boy had done, though trying hard to mask her satisfaction. "Was there ever such a lad?"

With that Sir Hillary chucked her under the chin.

"Tabby," said he, "you will dance a Highland fling with me or life will not be worth the living."

"I am not such a goose, young sir."

"Tush, Tabby—*Tabitha*—you are an angel, isn't she, Guardy?"

"The devil she is!" said I, angry that he should suggest my kissing such an old wind-mill.

"That is where our opinions differ, Guardy; but, admitting you to be right, you should be congenial company for each other, eh, Charity?"

Charity, little pleased at the attention bestowed

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on her nurse by my ward, pouted and sniffed scornfully at Sir Hillary, who retaliated by pelting her with roses from a great vase on the mantel; and one rich crimson bloom falling on her dainty head, nestled in her hair as though it belonged there, while the rest bestrewed the table round her slippered feet. Even now, when I shut my eyes, I can see as plainly as though it were but yesterday the little maid high on her perch, her pretty face petulant and pink, the glorious flower flaring out in vivid crimson 'gainst the chestnut curls that crowned her, and the slight, well-rounded, girlish figure all in white set off vastly fine by the dark-colored wall of the room beyond. No wonder they called her the Rose of Devon. And as I viewed her I admitted that she was worthy to mate with any man, even Sir Hillary himself.

"It is always like this when I lend a soft ear to her pleadings. Never do I yield to her tricky tongue but something happens to make me regret it," scolded Tabitha.

"Oh, Tabby, I know you can't be cross with me," said her young mistress, coaxingly.

"Oh, Tabby, we know you can't be cross with us," chanted Hillary and I, in persuasive chorus; and joining hands, we danced around her chair. Confessedly not a dignified performance for a man of my years, but be it remembered that birthdays beyond a certain age are occasional, to say the least. Mistress Tabitha, astonished at this riotous proceeding, jerked her head so sharply that she sent her spectacles flying, and they caught on Hillary's embroidered coat, an

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accident that was observed by every one but the good dame, for without the glasses she was as blind as a bat.

"Oh, deary me," she cried, "my specs! My blessed specs!"

Hillary winked at Charity, and still ornamented with the missing article, made energetic search, assisted by me, Tabitha's tongue serving as spur to urge us on.

"Sir Hillary has them," said Charity, basely betraying the trust we had imposed in her.

"I might have known it!" cried Tabitha, grasping wildly at Hillary, who, eluding her as she rose from the chair, tossed the glasses to me.

"Take her into the ball-room," commanded he. "There is not a lighter or a prettier foot dancing, I will wager."

"How did you guess it?" simpered the young thing of sixty seasons. "Since the Captain is so insistent, I think I will try a few steps."

Before I had a chance to object or escape, she had me by the arm at the door. So giving in with the best grace I could, I restored the missing spectacles to her, and in another moment we were stepping it in the ball-room as gayly as many a much younger couple present.

Meanwhile Sir Hillary calmly sat himself down in a great arm-chair and looked pensively at the little maid, who was now quite wearied of her exalted position on the table.

"Well?" said he, at last.

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"Well, what, sir?" said Mistress Charity, crossly.

"What will you offer me to let you down?"

"Nothing, sir. I'll manage it without you if I have to."

"I am surprised that you should be willing to lower yourself," observed Sir Hillary, as though a trifle shocked.

"But as I have refused *your* aid, how can that come to pass?"

"I doubt if you can make good your boast," went on the lad. "Jumping on heels like stilts is dangerous business."

"There is danger in everything," answered Charity, wisely.

"True; even in love-making," said he.

"While of that I know nothing, I fail to see how you can be right, Sir Hillary."

"There is danger of marriage. Egad, is that not enough to make a man thoughtful?"

"Marriage is not to be laughed at, sir."

"I agree with you there. Tears are more appropriate."

"Will you take me down?" she demanded, stamping her foot.

"Not I. For once I am able to look up to a maid, and that is such a rarity I have no mind to end it sooner than I need."

Mistress Charity calmly kicked off her slippers and jumped down as lightly as a cat could have done; but as she carelessly laid her foot-gear on the table while she descended, Sir Hillary, seeing his chance,

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quickly possessed himself of one of the pair, retreating across the room for safety.

"A prize!" he cried. "I' faith, a nutshell."

"You are over-bold, sir," said she. "Give me my shoe."

"Not so, Mistress Plotter. I believe you are a conspirator."

"And why so?"

"Because nut-shells usually are *high-trees-on;*" and, quite overcome at the utter inanity of his own vile pun, the young baronet laughed until he wept.

Charity, balancing on one foot, regarded him with a look of severe disdain.

"Pray give me my slipper," she said, severely.

"Not so. More than once you have wounded my feelings. With such a shoe it will be an easy *feat* to *heal* them, and so shall I do."

"Of all silly puns I have ever heard there have been none worse than these," said the girl.

"I *think* you are right," said Sir Hillary, not at all rebuked; "but let me restore this slipper to its place, and then I will be *shoer*."

(Heaven forbid that the responsibility for this nonsense be placed upon my shoulders, but since I have recorded it, no doubt for so doing I will be called to account by some critical reader. Therefore, in extenuation I will say it has been my experience that many are more fond of a pun than they are willing to publicly admit, and that the worse the pun the more the merriment resulting from its manufacture. *Such* being the case, I am sure some one will laugh long and loud-

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ly when he gets to this part of the narrative; and as it merely reflects a certain stage of the game of love-making, which is at all points more or less silly to lookers-on, though, of course, serious business to those concerned, I consider its presence in this love-tale not altogether unpardonable.)

"I refuse," said Charity, promptly. "I do not want you near me."

"Then I will keep the slipper," he threatened.

"What can you do with it?"

"It is not big enough for an inkstand. Egad, I have it. Guardy needs a snuff-box. I'll make him a birthday present."

"Please give it to me."

"Not I," said Sir Hillary, and he thrust the slipper into his pocket.

At this moment Sir Humphrey Berkely entered from the dancing.

"Mistress Charity," said he, with a graceful bow, "my turn for a dance, is it not?"

Charity hid her slipperless foot beneath her skirt and looked daggers at Sir Hillary.

"I would be delighted to dance with you," she said, "but—"

"Circumstances over which she has no control," put in Hillary, with a chuckle.

"Make it quite impossible," finished Charity.

"Indeed?" said Sir Humphrey, in gentle amazement. "Then will you promenade?"

Charity bit her lip in anger, but Hillary had good-humor enough for two.

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"Another disappointment, cousin," he said, with a laugh. "The young lady cannot accept this invitation, either."

"You are marvellously confident," Sir Humphrey answered, angrily.

"Quite so," replied Hillary. "'Tis one of my faults, Humphrey. Is it not as I have said, Mistress Charity?"

"Ye-es," said that exasperated young lady, lovelier than ever in her pique.

"Alluring as any invitation from you, Humphrey, must necessarily be, Mistress Holliston finds it quite impossible to deprive herself of my charming society. What a beautiful thing it is to be appreciated, is it not, cousin?"

As Sir Hillary sank languidly down in a cushioned chair, fanning himself with a rose, Charity felt that she would have given almost anything to box his ears; but this being impossible, she decided that to admit the humiliating truth was better than that such assurance should be permitted to remain undisturbed and unrebuked.

"Sir Humphrey," said she, "the truth of the matter is that your cousin has my slipper."

"What!" cried Sir Humphrey, in surprise. "And how came it in his possession?"

"I have been at her feet since we first met," answered the guilty gentleman. "Some young ladies give adoring swains the mitten, but Mistress Charity, being of an original turn of mind, has introduced this new method; and, on my word, cousin, there is much to be said in its favor."

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Sir Humphrey frowned, and then concluding that his disapproval would have no effect, unless it added to his cousin's enjoyment, smiled sweetly.

"I entreat in the name of Mistress Holliston that you return her property, thus making it possible for her to accept or refuse my invitation as she may see fit," he said, calmly.

"Very well," said Hillary, "I will shoe the mare, and then you can take her for a gallop in the ball-room."

"Not so," interrupted Charity. "Sir Humphrey shall have the pleasure of putting on my slipper."

"I think not," said the lad. "The privilege assuredly is mine, and hang me if I yield it to any man."

Here was another deadlock.

"Stay," said Hillary, as a thought occurred to him. "I'll shake dice with you, Humphrey. The winner shall officiate. That is fair."

"Agreed," said Sir Humphrey, who inherited a love for gambling.

Then the two rattled the bones like a couple of tavern gamesters, and becoming absorbed in the main, finished with Humphrey as winner, only to find that the young lady had skilfully picked Hillary's pocket, put on her slipper unaided, and was now dancing gayly with Sir Timothy Topleigh in the ball-room adjoining.

Sir Humphrey swore savagely, but Hillary laughed till his sides ached.

"You are like the slipper," said he to his cousin. "Sold, egad!" and he laughed again.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK MIDNIGHT GOES VISITING

AS it was now high time for Sir Hillary to pay some attention to his other guests, he re-entered the ball-room and proceeded to make himself agreeable, while his cousin, angry at being so flouted by Mistress Holliston, sought comfort in another pipe, this time alone, only to be disturbed by the entrance of Squire Armstrong. That worthy borrowed the lights to assist in a search for a jewel let fall by one of the ladies in a dark corner, and as he did not trouble to bring back the candelabra the room remained in a state of semi-darkness save where the glow from the adjoining apartment stole between the curtains hanging at the door.

For some little time Humphrey sat in moody comfort with a frown on his handsome face, while the slow and methodical puffing of the smoke from his pipe seemed to indicate that he was deep in thought. Now while I, so far, have devoted comparatively little space to this clever young gentleman, I think it full time that certain facts concerning his past life and present condition be fully explained, as they will provide the motive for his subsequent villanous be-

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havior towards Sir Hillary. When everything is taken into consideration, it is not to be wondered at that he should be of a sneering and sarcastic disposition. His father, who had fought bravely for the King, after years of privation during the sway of Cromwell, had returned to England with the second Charles, and, being once more high in favor, seemed to renew the extravagant tastes of his youth; for before he died he gambled away all his property at cards. Even the old lands and the strange house that he had erected a few years previous to the breaking out of the war had to be sold to pay his debts of honor, and it was in this manner that they passed into the possession of Master Merciful Holliston, Humphrey being left with naught but a small income and the title of Baronet. As the former was hardly sufficient for his needs and the latter no great honor—for after the Restoration gentlemen who could prefix *Sir* to their names were as thick as fleas—it is not strange that he should be discontented with his lot, envious of Sir Hillary, to whom he was but distantly related though his heir-at-law, or should find it impossible to ride by the great house that had been his father's without cursing that parent's reckless profligacy in squandering what should have been the son's birthright. Naturally a desire to win back the family estate took possession of his mind, and, as he was quite as much in love with Mistress Charity as with any woman, the easiest method of obtaining his wish seemed to be to gain her hand in marriage; so, having succeeded in ingratiating himself in the favor

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of Master Merciful, he proceeded to pay his court to the girl with seeming success, until a certain affair with the not too immaculate daughter of the village butcher reached the old gentleman's ears. When Sir Humphrey paid his next visit it was Merciful Holiston himself who received him, and in a few words made plain that the welcome hitherto extended to the son of the former owner no longer existed. A day or so later Charity encountered Sir Hillary upon the highway, and since then Humphrey had seen plainly that he stood but little chance of rivalling his more fortunate cousin, and was correspondingly depressed in consequence.

A slight noise at the window attracted his attention. Turning his head that he might the better listen, he waited for the sound to be repeated; and after a moment's pause there came another rattling, which, though slight, was persistently continued, until there could no longer be a doubt that some one outside was endeavoring to effect an entrance, deceived by the darkness of the room into the belief that it was unoccupied. Humphrey hesitated for a moment. Then, deciding to pursue his investigations alone—for since his despoilment on the highway he carried a pistol—he tiptoed across the room and, stepping behind the portière, awaited developments. No great strain was placed upon his patience, for in less than a minute the burglar had pushed back the hasp fastening the shutters, and, quickly opening the window, stepped into the room with a tread as light as a cat's. After listening for a few seconds, he glided rapidly

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around the place as though to obtain the lay of the land, and then, with a chuckle, picked up a pipe which had been left on the table. At this moment Humphrey stepped out from behind the curtains with levelled pistol.

"Attempt to draw a weapon," said he, "and I fire."

Unexpected as this interruption was, Carleycroft never moved an eyelid. He even smiled pleasantly as he placed the pipe he had taken possession of upon the table, with a hand as steady as though he had not just broken into the house and been caught in the act.

"I would not shoot if I were you," he said, cheerfully. "It is not impossible for you to hit me, and blood-stains ruin the floor; besides, I hate violence, especially between gentlemen."

Sir Humphrey could not but admire the sublime impudence of the new-comer.

"You are a cool hand," he said, keeping Carleycroft covered with his pistol.

"You flatter me," replied that gentleman, politely. "May I take a chair?"

As he spoke he sat down and crossed his legs comfortably.

"Taking things is your business, I suppose?"

"My *profession*, sir. Profession, if you please. Really, to hear you speak one might think me a grocer or a gentleman or some similarly ridiculous person."

While Carleycroft rattled on in this lively fashion he stealthily drew his dagger with the hand farthest

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from his captor, and so slyly did he accomplish this feat that had not a sudden beam of light flashed from the blade there can be but little doubt that Humphrey's life would have ended then and there. As it was, he detected the highwayman's purpose in time, and forced him to drop his weapon on the floor.

"What brought you here, Master House-breaker?" he demanded.

Carleycroft rose to his feet, and, pouring himself a glass of wine from a decanter near-by, replied, goblet in hand:

"I was accompanied by a regimental band and a battery of artillery. Did you not hear us coming?"

Sir Humphrey smiled in spite of himself at the other's sarcasm.

"Surely," said he, "it's a foolish trick to burglarize a house full of guests."

"On the contrary, nothing is easier if one is blessed with the manners and appearance of a gentleman," replied Carleycroft, apparently leaning on the back of a chair, but in reality raising it little by little preparatory to hurling it at the other. "A cool head, a little impudence, and who could tell that you are not one of the company who came late? Believe me, I have been most successful in several such enterprises as this. I remember one evening in London when I danced with a duchess, gave sage advice to a cabinet minister, and kissed his daughter, all 'twixt the hours of ten and midnight. Really, I have quite a taste for society."

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"Drop that chair!" cried Sir Humphrey, suddenly realizing his danger.

"Certainly, sir. Anything to oblige, I am sure," said Carleycroft, abandoning his second effort as good-humoredly as the first.

"Sit down!" ordered Sir Humphrey, and noticing that the other, as he obeyed, stealthily placed his foot on the dagger lying on the floor, he strode forward and kicked it across the room.

"Quite so," said Carleycroft, amiably. "One is so liable to cut one's fingers with such a plaything."

"Or some other man's throat," said Sir Humphrey, for he fully appreciated what a dangerous customer he had to deal with.

"Very true, my friend. May I smoke?"

"No, I have no desire for a faceful of ashes, thank you."

"Really, sir," said Carleycroft, thus foiled for the third time, "your cleverness is worthy of a professional. Perhaps you have dabbled—?"

"Not at all," said Sir Humphrey, sharply.

"Purely an *amateur*, eh? Accept my congratulations. Well, what have you to say to me? You must excuse me for hurrying you, but as I have rather an important engagement in a few moments—"

"I will endeavor to be brief," said Sir Humphrey. "To begin with, you came in by the window intending to commit a robbery."

Carleycroft looked at him with a sarcastic smile on his dissipated face.

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"You wrong me, young sir," said he. "To tell the truth, I have an appointment with a lady dwelling here, and I mistook this for the window of her room. Poor Fanny! She must be weary waiting for me. She insisted on my coming, and I had not the heart to refuse the little dear. Handsome men, young sir, have certain obligations as well as prerogatives. Dear lady! You know yourself, sir, how foolish many women are when we dashing devils are concerned."

"A delicious falsehood," said Sir Humphrey.

"You do not believe me? Ah, I see there is no use in trying to deceive you, so I will tell the truth. The lad who lives here on Sundays cons the Scriptures in my company, and his unwonted absence of late having alarmed me, I thought I would drop in and make a few inquiries concerning the child."

In spite of the gravity of the situation both men laughed at this utterly absurd statement.

"Master House-breaker," said Sir Humphrey, "for certain reasons it is better that we should be friends than enemies."

"Indeed?" said the gentleman thus addressed. "You surprise me."

"A single cry from me will put a rope around your neck, but, though you did plunder me the other night upon the highway, I have no wish to end your career."

"Such generosity!" murmured Carleycroft, in rapturous tones.

"Promise to make no attack on me while we con-

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verse, and I will guarantee your safety for the same time."

"Done," said Carleycroft, and he lighted and smoked the pipe he had laid hands on when he first entered.

"How is Lady Castlemaine?" said Sir Humphrey, suddenly.

"The devil! You know the lady?" cried the highwayman, in surprise.

"Yes. I had business that took me to Dulverton about a month ago, and I saw you with her at the inn. You need have no fear, though. No one else recognized the lady."

"Ah," said Carleycroft, with a sigh of comic relief. "I am glad I did not compromise her."

And with that he winked at Sir Humphrey, and the two, now on the best of terms, laughed together, for of all the notorious women of the Court of Charles the Second none was more scandalous in behavior than Barbara, afterwards Duchess of Cleveland.

"You fly high, sir," said Sir Humphrey, helping himself to wine. "The King is no paltry rival!"

"Pish! The King will never know."

"Were you ever a captain in Essex's Horse?" said Sir Humphrey, quietly.

Carleycroft started, and then cast an evil glance in the direction of his captor.

"No!" he answered, with an oath. "Why do you ask the question?"

"You need not attempt to deceive me. I recog-

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nize you, sir. Your name is Gabriel Carleycroft, and for one winter you were quartered at the house of Sir Reginald Berkely, not far from here."

"Well, and if that is true, what of it?" asked the highwayman, sullenly.

"Oh, nothing of importance. Perhaps you remember the little boy who showed you the secret passage to the garden, and was soundly flogged for it by his father?"

"As though it were but yesterday. And you are he?"

"Yes," said Sir Humphrey. "Time has changed us."

"Truly," replied the other. "Come! Let's to business. What is your game?"

"My game?" repeated Sir Humphrey.

"Yes. You have some object in not handing me over to the authorities. You think you can make use of me. I ask you to tell me how."

"A business-like statement," said the young gallant. "I will be equally pertinent. No doubt one hundred guineas are worth as much to you as to anyman."

"True."

"And you are not squeamish as to how they are obtained?"

"No more so than yourself."

"You are saucy, sir!"

"You began it, you know."

"I will not beat around the bush."

"It does sometimes frighten the birds," admitted Carleycroft.

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"I will give the amount I have mentioned if you will so contrive that a certain young gentleman shall no longer annoy me."

"Murder?"

"Hush, man. Not that word!"

"Leaving the word out of the question, that is what you mean?" said Carleycroft.

His captor nodded.

"I fight fair always when I do fight. I refuse your offer, and if you feel so disposed you may summon your friends," Carleycroft said, firmly.

"Your scruples do you credit," sneered Sir Humphrey.

"I cannot return the compliment, sir."

"You refuse?"

"One moment. Is this—this *friend* of yours a man of spirit?"

"He is so considered."

"Then if I bid him stand and deliver on the highway, leaving him a good chance to beat me off by fight, he would, no doubt, resist?"

"I am sure of it," said Sir Humphrey, eagerly.

"Then we could fight it out to our hearts' content, and, as it would be as fair for one as for the other, murder would not enter into the matter."

"I quite agree with you."

"Get your guineas," said Carleycroft, blowing a series of rings in the air from his pipe.

"I have your word of honor that you will remain here until I return?" asked Sir Humphrey.

"My what?—ahem! Of course. Really, I had

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quite forgotten I had possessed one. Thanks for recalling it to mind."

Sir Humphrey rose from his seat and went in search of his cousin. I often think what a statesman the lad might have become, for it surely indicated genius when he decided to make Sir Hillary pay for his own assassination. He would have been a Prime Minister at least.

CHAPTER XIV

JACK MIDNIGHT AMUSES HIMSELF AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS

I WAS a trifle surprised to find Sir Hillary sitting in the dark when I entered the room where I had left him, but, as I knew a fondness for solitude and meditation often followed the discovery of a divinity worthy of worship, I decided that the lad was pondering on the numerous charms of Mistress Holliston, and sought gloom as an aid to reflection.

"I owe you one, my boy," I said, slapping him on the shoulder.

"The devil you do," said the figure in the shadow.
"If so, you had best pay it at once."

"Gabriel!" I exclaimed, in astonishment and alarm.

"Right you are," he said, pleasantly.

"How did you get in here?"

"By asking for you, my dear fellow. A servant has been searching for you for the last five minutes."

"But you are in danger here," I said, in terror.

"I am everywhere, my friend. Quite a merry-making, is it not? In whose honor?"

"It is my birthday," I said, reluctantly.

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"Damme!" he cried, with a chuckle. "Your twenty-first, no doubt?"

"My fiftieth," I answered, shortly, for I did not know that he was lying when he said he had come to seek me, and therefore scented danger for my ward at once.

"If any one had told me twenty-five years ago that my friend Weatherby would have a birthday feast and neglect to send his old pal an invitation I would have given him the lie," he went on, puffing contentedly on his pipe.

"Not you, Gabriel," said I. "More likely you would have murmured a prayer in his behalf."

"I admit I wasted a good deal of time on such silly nonsense in the old days," he said, with a chuckle. "But in my childhood I believed in fairies, and, while the folly of the thing is quite apparent now, it caused me some little pleasure then, and is therefore not entirely to be regretted."

Feeling certain that some inkling of the truth concerning Hillary's succession to the title borne by Sir Julien and the lands and hall of Grenville Manor had reached Carleycroft, and this visit was paid me in consequence, I decided to take the bull by the horns and, if possible, disarm his suspicions by seeming frankness.

"Doubtless you wonder that I should live in Grenville Hall?" I began.

"You must admit," said he, "that you did not seem over popular with Sir Julien when I last had the pleasure of meeting you together."

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"I can guess your object in coming here," I went on, slowly, feeling my way word by word.

"Can you, indeed?" he said. "That is rather curious, is it not?"

"I know what you intend to ask me."

"This is interesting, I declare," he observed, looking at me curiously, and no wonder, for, as I afterwards found out, he had not the slightest idea of what I was driving at. "Well, such being the case, what is your answer?"

"Sir Hillary Grenville—"

"A pretty name, i' faith!"

"Succeeded to his *uncle's* estates shortly after the death of Sir Julien."

"The old boy had a nephew, eh? Lucky dog, Sir Hillary," he said, carelessly.

"So you see your suspicions were quite groundless?"

"Entirely groundless, of course," he admitted, with a little reluctance.

"When I tell you that Sir Hillary is the nephew instead of the son that explains everything?" I said, delighted that what I had feared would be a difficult task had proved a simple matter after all.

"Quite so, Lorrimer, quite so," Carleycroft answered, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at me inquiringly, "but that does not make clear how you come to be a resident here. Unless—? No, no, of course not. Er—excuse the question, but *you* did not know the boy's mother?"

He winked at me meaningly, and I felt my cheeks

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grow hot, for I could not pretend to misunderstand him.

"I did know the lady," I said, slowly, "also Hillary's father. Believe me when I say your insinuation is quite uncalled for."

"I beg your pardon, lad. Consider my remark withdrawn," he answered, penitently.

"Lord Rokeby was made Sir Hillary's guardian when his father died, and I was chosen to succeed him when his lordship sickened from old age. Since then I have lived here."

"You always were a lucky fellow," he said, almost enviously.

"Now that I have told you all, you are quite satisfied?" I asked.

Carleycroft looked at his pipe, then at the decanter on the table beside him, and lastly at me.

"Perfectly so," he answered.

Suddenly Sir Humphrey Berkely entered the room. My heart was up in my throat in a trice, for I could not but expect that Sir Humphrey would recognize his despoiler, and, if such were the case, he would, of course, give the alarm and the devil be to pay generally. The young gentleman seemed quite taken back at finding two of us.

"Do I intrude?" he stammered.

"Not at all," replied Carleycroft, promptly. "Come in, young sir. The more the merrier, eh, Weatherby?"

"Certainly," I answered, sick with fright, for I had no idea then that this worthy couple were hand in glove.

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"Pray introduce me to your friend, Lorrimer?" he said, coolly, as though he were an honest man instead of such a famous rogue.

"Sir Humphrey Berkely," I began, then hesitated, for I knew not what to call my unwelcome visitor.

"Master Persevering Nabber," prompted Carleycroft, with a gracious smile.

I repeated this oddly appropriate name, which was not one jot more ridiculous than many well known at the time. And the two bowed.

"Delighted to meet you," said Sir Humphrey, still stammering.

"You honor me," said Carleycroft. "I beg your pardon, but your face seems familiar. Have we met before?"

Considering, as I subsequently ascertained, that it was scarcely five minutes since they had parted, the paralyzing assurance of this last remark can be readily appreciated.

"I think not," said Sir Humphrey, now cool as ever. "Nay, I am sure of it, Master Nabber."

"Probably our good friend Weatherby has mentioned your name to me. That explains my error," said Carleycroft. "Have a chair, Sir Humphrey."

Before the bewildered new-comer could accept the invitation so cordially extended to him a girlish figure glided between the curtains, and, advancing to our shadowy corner, made a courtesy of comic reverence.

"Good sirs," said she, "this sequestration of able-

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bodied bachelors is high treason to the sex. Be warned in time, I beg of you."

"Stab my vitals!" whispered Carleycroft. "If this keeps on, I will know all your guests."

Then, before I could form words to answer her, he rose, and, bowing politely, begged for the privilege of an introduction. Thank Heaven, he kept in the shadow, and thus the resemblance, which in a good light she could not have failed to observe, escaped her entirely.

"Mistress Holliston," said Sir Humphrey, ceremoniously, "permit me to present Master Nabber."

"Master Nabber?" cried this truthful and ingenuous miss. "Not he of whom you have *so often* spoken, Humphrey? I am indeed delighted! Sir Humphrey has told me *so much* concerning you that I feel as though we were old friends."

"The deuce he has!" said Carleycroft. "What has he been saying of me?"

The predicament in which Mistress Charity had needlessly placed herself was so comical that even the gravity of the situation could not rid me of my desire to laugh at her unconscious exhibition of mendacity, therefore I stuffed my handkerchief into my mouth and awaited further developments with interest, while she, quite unsuspecting of the real state of affairs, apparently resolving to add another to her list of conquests, replied, "Oh, all sorts of nice things too numerous to repeat."

Then, with a sigh that was marvellously taking, she added:

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"I fear you were very gay in your youth, Master Nabber."

"I fear I was, Mistress Holliston," said Carleycroft, and how he smothered his laughter I know not. "Were I a trifle younger, I will warrant I would give some of these youngsters who hope to call you wife a close race of it."

"Perhaps you can do that even now if you will but try," she suggested, giving him an encouraging glance from behind her fan.

• "May I have a dance?" he cried.

"Not so," said I. "Mistress Charity has not honored me to-night. It is my turn first."

And half wild with dread lest this reckless gentleman ruin the labor of years by appearing in the glare of the ball-room lights, thus courting comparison with Sir Hillary, I almost forced Mistress Charity out of the room in spite of her pouting, leaving Sir Humphrey and Carleycroft together.

CHAPTER XV

THE HIGHWAYMAN AND THE LOOKING-GLASS

CARLEYCROFT stepped to the doorway, and from the shelter afforded him by the curtain looked after Mistress Charity.

"A mighty fine girl, that," he said, as though delivering a verdict of much importance.

"Such is the opinion of the country-side," observed Sir Humphrey, complacently.

"And the yellow boys?"

"I cannot lay hand on them to-night."

"My terms are cash in advance."

"You shall have half of it within the week; the rest when you complete the affair," said Sir Humphrey.

Carleycroft, still at the door, gave a start of surprise.

"Come hither, young sir," said he. "Who is that great lad?"

"Hillary Grenville, our host," answered Sir Humphrey. "You do not know him?"

"No; and yet I seem to recognize his face."

"Doubtless you will remember it in the future. That is the man you are to deal with," said the baronet.

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Something in the ball-room caught Sir Humphrey's attention, and he did not see Carleycroft as he turned away come within an ace of walking into a great mirror that stood just within the door. It flashed brilliantly before the eyes of the highwayman his own handsome, dissipated face, and suddenly *he knew the truth*. He choked back a cry of astonishment; then, for a moment overcome by this wonderful discovery, sank down nerveless in a chair.

"My child!" thought he. "*My boy and hers!* Good God!"

All was now plain to his mind. The clumsy explanation—the well-meant lies that I had told him were swept away, consumed by this flaming truth like cobwebs on dewy grass by the summer sun. *His* child was the owner of this great park and ancestral hall. With a feeling of pride and love—aye, *even* love—he dwelt upon the huge stature and handsome face of the lad. How *she* would have exulted in such a son. Poor Clare! He almost sobbed as he remembered that last frightful hour at the wayside inn. . . .

Who was he that he should yield to such weakness? What right had such a godless ruffian to think of the past? Wilfully, incessantly, he had labored all these years to efface the memory of his youthful love, and now what had he accomplished? He had raised up a barrier that would forever separate him from his son. Ah! *If he had known.*

The boy must never learn the truth. Carleycroft

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swore it with his teeth clinched. No shame, no disgrace should be brought upon this lad's name by deed of his. He would die as he had lived, alone, defiant, friendless, and the boy should be none the wiser. Why had a God so kind to some been such a creature of incarnate cruelty to him? Then he laughed, for he, for a moment, had forgotten that there was no God. Religion was the fairy-tale of full-grown men. Souls but chimeras carved from out of superstition by mankind's self-conceit.

"It shall be as Clare would wish it," he thought, then smiled bitterly as he remembered that he had been hired to attack—to assassinate—his own son. Truly, life was only a sneering, pitiless jest after all.

"Come," said Sir Humphrey. "Now that you have seen the fellow, this is no place for you."

"You are in a hurry to have me go?"

"I do not deny it," answered the other.

"Oh, sacred hospitality, how thou art outraged!" said Carleycroft, gayly.

"You had best go the way you came."

"Very well," he answered, raising the window. "Have the kindness to close the shutters after me."

"Stay! Where can I find you when I want you?"

"A message addressed to Jack Midnight—"

"You?" cried Sir Humphrey, starting back.

"You Jack Midnight?"

"At your service. Send all communications in care of Toby Cracker at the Grenville Arms."

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As he spoke, Carleycroft's head disappeared below the level of the window-ledge, only to bob up in view almost immediately.

"Sir Humphrey," he said, with a sarcastic smile, "pray give my love to the disconsolate Fanny, and explain to the little dear how I was detained; also commend me to my biblical scholar." Then, looking down, he added, "'Tis rather a high drop, but I've taken a drop or two in my time, egad! My love to Mistress Charity. *Au revoir!*"

Sir Humphrey closed the shutters, and fastened them and the window with a sigh of relief.

"A marvellous resemblance!" he murmured. "Ay, marvellous. I' faith, I must bear it in mind."

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CHAPTER XVI

SIR HILLARY LEAVES ALL TO CHANCE

CHARITY made up her mind to punish Sir Hillary for his presumption, and studiously removed herself from his path for the next hour. It being necessary for him to pay a certain amount of attention to a number of sighing, ogling young damsels, he was unable to set forth in deliberate and unswerving pursuit until nearly midnight. Then, catching sight of her in a distant corner, for the moment cavaliered by no less a person than the narrator of this tale, he strolled carelessly over and informed me that Mistress Banthorpe was in urgent need of my society. Knowing quite as well as the girl herself what this manœuvre was for, I bowed and left them to continue their quarrel in peace.

"You are a wicked girl, Charity Holliston!" he said, severely. "If ever a damsel ached for a slippering vigorously applied it is your father's daughter."

"You frighten me, Sir Hillary," she meekly replied. "What have I done to call forth such disapproval?"

"You are a flirt," he said—"a conscienceless flirt."

"I am a woman, sir," she admitted.

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"So I have been led to believe, and as yet I have seen no reason to doubt the correctness of that opinion," he answered, carelessly.

"I think you had better go away," she said, in a tone of sincere conviction.

"Honestly?" he queried.

"Yes, since you are politic—" she began, intending to evolve an epigram.

"So are you," he said, quickly.

"And honesty is the best policy," she continued, "therefore—"

"Not in society, Mistress Holliston. There policy is the best honesty always," he interrupted again.

"Don't try to be cynical," said she.

"Believe me, near you it is no effort, besides, I am a philosopher, not a cynic."

"Not you, Sir Hillary. A cynic is one who tells the truth; a philosopher one who keeps it to himself," she answered, sharply.

Hillary frowned.

"You have been talking with Cousin Humphrey," he said.

"A very clever man," observed Mistress Charity, in a tone of approval.

"Ay, clever enough, but over-bitter," said Sir Hillary. "Sometimes I almost fancy he hates me because I am the more fortunate."

"Oh, the conceit of Man! No doubt you think all the maidens gathered here to-night are heels over head in love with you?"

"I have hardly so flattering an opinion of their

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taste," he answered, "but, candidly now, if they were, would you blame them?"

"Yes," she said, decidedly. "A man should possess other good qualities besides six feet of height."

"Six feet and two inches," he corrected.

"Dear, dear, so bad as that?" murmured she.

"So bad?" he repeated, in surprise. "Surely the more of anything of value the better?"

"Of value to whom?"

"To you, Mistress Charity," he answered, coolly.

"I do not need a body-guard," said she.

"Every woman does," he insisted.

"But they do not take the first who offers. In selection a woman has her greatest triumph."

"And is usually guilty of her greatest folly," said Sir Hillary. "Come, it is too warm in here."

He opened the shutters, and, offering his arm to the girl, led her out on a little balcony at the rear of the house. She leaned over the railing and drew a long breath, for the night air was cool and sweet with the odor of the dew-spangled flowers in the garden below.

Sir Hillary sat down on the rail and folded his arms.

"You are the loveliest woman that I have ever known," he said.

"You flatter me," quoth she, but she flushed a little at the suddenness of his attack.

"They say beauty is but skin deep," Mistress Charity went on, lightly.

"What a little Puritan you are," he said. "In

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spite of your coquetry you show unmistakably the stern old sect from which you sprung."

"How so, Sir Hillary?" she asked, with a smile that brought the dimples out in bold evidence.

"You have all the old proverbs at your tongue's end, and believe in their truth so implicitly," he said, laughing.

"And you do not believe them true?"

"I can prove them utterly false without a mite of trouble."

"Do so," said she, defiantly.

"Very well, lady. 'Tis a poor rule that does not work both ways, eh?"

"Can you prove that wrong, Sir Hillary?"

"As full of wrong as matrimony."

"You are always thinking of marriage," she cried, in a petulant tone.

"To avoid peril keep the danger in mind," he answered.

"Go on with your argument," she said.

"'It is a poor rule that does not work both ways,' and 'Every rose has its thorn.' Then every thorn should have its rose, and if that were so, where would our blackberries come from?"

Mistress Charity laughed in spite of herself.

"You are so ridiculous," she said. "But how about 'a bird in the hand'? Is that not worth 'two in the bush'?"

"That depends largely on who owns the bird," said Sir Hillary, with a chuckle, as a poaching adventure of his youth was recalled to his mind.

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"Do you ever think of anything but nonsense?" she asked, soberly.

"Nothing but nonsense and you," said the lad, firmly. "The two give me all I can do justice to at the present time."

The girl was quite in earnest now for a wonder.

"You are throwing your life away, Sir Hillary."

"And why should I not?" he asked.

"Are you ever serious?" she said, slowly.

Hillary laughed softly before he answered.

"I cannot say that I remember such a thing," he said. "Ah, why should I be, Mistress Charity? The world is so bright and beautiful. I love its sunshine, and it makes me merry. I have friends—dear friends—who love me and would trust me to the death. I am rich; the world lies before me. I am young and strong. Even were I a beggar I should be happy from the mere consciousness of life and strength."

"And you devote it all to idle pleasure," she murmured. "Ah, Sir Hillary, you are wrong. You, who could do so much if you willed it, are wasting the talents God gave you to use for the good of others."

There was a moment's pause, then Sir Hillary spoke.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "And yet I am not altogether to blame. I have grown up with no one to direct or encourage ambition towards any object but pleasure. Remember, I never knew a mother's love and care. Dear old Guardy has done

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his best, but I am not what I would have been had I a mother or a sister to urge me to effort, to be proud of my success, or to comfort me in failure. No good woman has ever truly cared for me. Can you wonder, then, that I am what I am—a drone—a butterfly—a mote that dances in the sunshine?"

"No sister could be more proud of your success than I," she whispered, for a group had formed within the room perilously near the open window.

"Charity," he said.

She read what was coming in the accents of his voice, but, woman-like, now sought to delay what he would say.

"I will be a mother to you if you like," she interrupted, with a laugh.

He drew back a step or two, hurt at the sudden alteration in her manner.

"By Heaven!" he murmured, 'neath his breath, "changing the tune shall not prevent my singing my part. Charity, I have something to say to you."

"It is so cool out here. Really, I fear I shall catch cold," she said.

"Charity," he began.

"Pray take me in, Sir Hiliary."

He offered her his arm, and, as she took it, seized her hand, and drew her in spite of her resistance to the farthest corner of the balcony.

"If ever a woman needed a master you are she," he said.

"What, sir?"

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"You cannot go until you hear what I would say," he declared, sternly.

"But I do not wish to hear it," she protested, covering her ears. He gently but firmly took down her hands and held them.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

She saw the look in his eyes, and faltered a little, but she was too much of a coquette to yield.

"Ye-es," she answered.

"It is untrue," he said, softly. "Nevertheless, I will let that pass. Women are like games of cards. Luck wins with them more often than worth."

"And you are worth, no doubt?"

He did not heed her gibe.

"Chance shall decide my future course," he said, "for so far in life I have left all to chance."

He fumbled in his coat for a coin, but found none.

"Have you a shilling?" he asked.

"Yes," said she, diving in her pocket, with a gurgling laugh.

He took the coin from her, and addressed her severely.

"I shall toss the shilling. If it comes head up-permost I will continue my attentions no matter what protest you make."

"And if it be the other?" she asked.

"Then I shall ride to the wars with Churchill to-morrow," he answered, throwing the coin.

It fell full in a patch of moonlight, for the clouds had long since been rolled away by the wind. Sir

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Hillary stooped beside it, then rose with a muffled curse.

"Tails," he said, disconsolately, turning away.

"Not so!" she cried, bending over the coin. "See, the head is uppermost."

She had fallen into the trap he had set so cunningly.

"My darling!" he whispered, softly, and hugged her to his breast.

"Let me go!" she cried, as though in chagrin.

"Let me go, sir!"

He held her close in spite of her struggles.

"Not till you say that you love me," he said.

"I will never do that. Let me go! I—I—will call for help," she protested, in a whisper.

"Do so," said he, defiantly.

"I hate you. I *hate* you! Coward—villain—let me go!"

"Say that you love me—"

"*I will not!* I will not! Oh, you mean old thing! You—you *know I do*," she half sobbed.

Then, as she clung sweetly round his neck, Sir Hillary kissed her again and again, and she gave the kisses back to him one by one.

"Would you really have gone away, dear?" she asked, a few moments later.

"Yes," he said, "though I hoped you would do exactly as you did."

"What would I have done without you?" she murmured, nestling closer to his side.

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"Yet you let me leave it to chance," he said, reproachfully.

"Do you think so?" asked she.

"I am sure of it," he answered.

"Go find the shilling?" commanded she.

The lad picked it up, wonderingly.

"Now look at it, Sir Doubter."

He gave a cry of surprise.

"There is a head on *each* side, Charity."

"Yes," she said. "Think you I left much to chance?"

Then, after he had kissed her, she added:

"It is my lucky piece, Hillary."

And even now, though many years have passed since that night, they both declare that she was right.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO COURT WORTHIES

PHILIP, Duke of Chesney, illegitimate son of James of York, afterwards the Papist king, was a very pretty fellow. He had a dashing way, soulful brown eyes, and a skilled valet, to whose good taste he owed much of his reputation as one of the most prominent court beaux. This fine young gentleman thought no dishonor too low for him to stoop to, provided by so doing he accomplished whatever object he had in view, and usually what he sought was well worthy of the means by which he obtained it. But then scoundrels were too plentiful at the levees of the Merry Monarch for one even so distinguished in general depravity as was his Grace of Chesney to attract particular attention. He sang love songs with adorable tenderness. He stole ladies' jewelry while dancing with them in a manner truly dexterous. He would have sold his mother, his wife, his daughter (had he one), or his sister to the highest bidder, and possibly wept if the price seemed to him hardly generous. Ay, he would have wept, and the next morning run a small sword through any one who took exception to his tears or

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thought him lacking in courage in consequence. He was a bully, a boaster, a duellist, a rake, a poet, a perfect scoundrel, and favorite of the King, who liked to hear him warble rapturously of honor and love, two things quite beyond the young nobleman's comprehension or desire. But when his Majesty found that his latest acquisition, Lady Holbrook, who had so gratefully accepted her Sovereign's left hand, at the same time had extended her own lily-white fingers to his favorite nephew, he felt quite enraged at her perfidy. One would have expected him to deprive Lady Holbrook of his favor; instead he made her a duchess, and exiled Philip of Chesney, who wept bitterly over his sad fate.

His Majesty, who was well used to tears, as he was not without experience with the fair sex, and whose ears were not strangers to profanity—for he still indulged himself with the society of Lady Castlemaine—was quite pitiless.

"Chesney," he said, playing with the silken ear of a spaniel, perhaps the only creature frequenting the court who was really faithful to his Majesty, "they say country air is good for the morals. Personally I know not if this be true, and as I am very busy at present" (Lady Holbrook had been sworn at this morning by Lady Castlemaine, and in revenge threw a scent-bottle in the latter's face, inflicting a quite perceptible bruise) "I shall send you to find if my information is authentic. Investigate the subject thoroughly for six months, and when you return report upon this matter to me."

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Chesney, finding repentance at a ruinous discount, accepted his sentence with the best grace that he could muster, and, leaving London, hied him to Devonshire. Six months seemed eternity, and the duke had no idea of permitting such a length of time to elapse before the Court should again be adorned by his presence.

At this period the secret Catholicism of the King was condoned by some, suspected by more, and openly reviled by others. More than once rumors of plots and conspiracies of all kinds had been gossiped of in London, and the duke had good reason to believe that in this cloud of smoke the tongue of flame, as yet too tiny to show its flare, had been kindled and was still smouldering in Devon, and so to Devon, as private gentleman, went his Grace. He honored the Cock Robin Inn with his presence, confided his real identity to the ear of Fortescue, who captained the soldiers at the neighboring barracks, and drank, played cards, and spied under the name of Lord Carton, never bothering to pay his reckoning, as his taking way made, for a time at least, legal tender of promises.

Lady Castlemaine loved adventure, and therefore had an affection for gentlemen of truly courageous spirit. So when Jack Midnight halted her coach on Hampstead Heath he was roundly cursed by her ladyship, enriched by all the jewelry she chanced to have upon her person, which was not inconsiderable, and finally soundly and lovingly kissed by the worthy dame. When the coach did finally start

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for London a cousin, *recently adopted*, rode on the seat by Lady Castlemaine's side, and it was quite three days before the Heath was again patrolled by its most famous frequenter. A month later an inn, some ten leagues from London, was the scene of a really affecting meeting between a handsome cavalier, whose dissipated face and iron-gray hair seemed evidence of a life by no means uneventful, and a ravishingly beautiful woman who carried her graceful figure with the air of a *grande dame*. Another inn in a different locality was similarly honored a few weeks afterwards. At Dulverton still another reunion took place, and then one afternoon the Cock Robin, on the highway not far from Grenville Hall, was thrown into excitement by the arrival of a lady of elegant bearing, who entered the inn and secured lodgings while wearing a veil so thick that the worthy host was quite unable to decide whether she was beautiful or not, which blissful uncertainty provided him with something else to live for, as he was much given to curiosity. It is needless to say that if Lady Castlemaine had known his Grace of Chesney was also domiciled beneath this roof that the Cock Robin would have been minus a guest, but, as she little suspected such a state of affairs, she made herself quite comfortable, and began to watch for the coming of one Gabriel Carleycroft, better known to fame as Jack Midnight.

Two hours later the host was summoned into the presence of his fair guest. To his delight she no longer wore her veil, and he vowed to himself that

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she was quite the comeliest dame that had ever done honor to his house.

"Sir," she said, and looked quite queenly as she spoke, "I expect a gentleman, who will in all probability arrive here this evening. When he comes let him be shown to my apartments immediately."

"Yes, your ladyship," replied Master Giles, with a bow and a scrape of his foot. "Shall I reserve lodgings for the gentleman?"

"I fancy it will be quite unnecessary," answered Madam Gay, for so she called herself *this time*. "My husband—"

"Quite so," said Master Giles. "Master Gay—?"

"He will not give that name," she interrupted, hastily.

"No?" said the innkeeper, in wonder.

"Silence, fellow!" said the lady, crossly, and for a moment seemed lost in thought. "Owing to certain happenings it is possible that he will decline to give his name. You must manage without it in some way."

At this moment there arose a great clatter on the road, and her ladyship hastened to look out of the window, only to see the long curls and broad shoulders of Sir Hillary Grenville disappear in a whirling dust kicked up by his horse's heels. Turning, she found that the landlord had not hesitated to look over her plump shoulder.

"That was young Sir Hillary Grenville," said he.

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"Sir Hillary Grenville," she echoed. "And who may that be?"

"Surely your ladyship has heard of him?" said Master Giles, in surprise. "He is the gayest young spark in Devonshire. And such a swordsman! Ah, Captain Weatherby, his guardian, has made him the equal of any fencer in England."

"I never heard of the gentleman, but then we know few of these rustic gallants in London," she said, carelessly.

"If you would describe the lov—er—ahem!—*the husband* you expect—I mean *your* husband—so that I might recognize him," suggested the innkeeper, "we might do without any bother as to names."

She hesitated a moment. Had she not been so high-bred a lady Master Giles would have thought she swore, but, of course, this was impossible, though what she murmured sounded like an oath to inexperienced ears.

"I scarce dare to give the name of Midnight," thought this most virtuous dame, "and yet I know him by none other."

Then she remembered a faded miniature of her outlaw lover, painted years before when he was scarcely more than a lad, which he had given her at the meeting in the inn at Dulverton. She had it with her now, suspended from her neck on a long, golden chain.

"Look," said she, holding it before the landlord's gaze. "This is his likeness. Though painted some years ago, the resemblance is still unmistakable."

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Master Giles stared at the picture, and with difficulty restrained the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips.

"She does not know Sir Hillary, yet carries his portrait in her bosom," thought he. "Oh, these women, these women!"

The miniature of Carleycroft at twenty-two was so like unto the dashing Sir Hillary Grenville of the present day that the mistake of the worthy landlord was quite excusable.

"Do you think you will recognize him?" she asked, anxiously.

"I could not fail to know so distinguished a gentleman, I am certain," said Master Giles.

"Very well," said her ladyship. "That is all, sir."

The innkeeper went down-stairs, chuckling to himself.

"These women," said he, "these women!"

And so tickled was he at his appreciation of the feminine character that he drank his own health in brown October ale.

CHAPTER XVIII

CERTAIN DOINGS AT THE COCK ROBIN

SIR HILLARY GRENVILLE paused on his homeward ride to drink a mug of ale at the Cock Robin. Immediately Master Giles hastened to his side.

"She is here and waiting for you, sir," said he to Hillary.

"She?" repeated Sir Hillary, in a rare puzzle. "Who, my good fellow?"

"Who?" said the innkeeper, laughing wisely. "As though you did not know!"

Sir Hillary looked at Master Giles suspiciously.

"He has been drinking," thought he. "Od's fish, my example has a pernicious effect upon the neighborhood."

"Who but your lady-love, sir" went on Master Giles, winking at the lad.

"The devil!" cried Sir Hillary, in surprise, believing that the host of the Cock Robin referred to Mistress Holliston. "Is she here?"

"She has been waiting this two hours, and is eager for your coming, sir. She has taken three rooms on

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the second floor, and says she does not know you, but I am to bring you up there at once."

"She has quarreled with her father, then?"

"She looks as though she would not hesitate to quarrel with the devil himself."

"What?" cried Sir Hillary, half a mind to throw the tankard at the innkeeper's head. "Mistress Charity is the gentlest maid in England."

"Yet, sir," replied Master Giles, "I much doubt if she would be pleased if she had a glimpse of the other one."

"The other one?" repeated Sir Hillary, in a great state of mystification.

"The other one who does not know your name, Sir Hillary, yet carries your portrait on a chain around her neck, and such a beautiful neck, too," chuckled the landlord, highly edified by the whole affair.

This was too much for my ward.

"Master Giles," said he, sternly. "It is a woful sight to see so elderly a man in his cups. I recommend the pump to you as a sure specific. I find it most effectual in similar cases myself."

"Have your joke, young sir—have your joke—but when you see her you will change your tune, or I am a Dutchman," said the host, with his finger laid beside his nose in a knowing fashion. "Pray follow me, Sir Hillary, and I will lead you to the lady."

"Since that seems to be the only way to solve this mystery," said the bewildered youth, "by all means show the way."

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At this moment Lady Castlemaine came out of the inn.

"I was bringing him to your ladyship," said Master Giles, with a wave of his fat hand towards Sir Hillary, who, struck by the wondrous beauty of the woman, stood silently before her.

"But this is not the gentleman," she said, starting, as she saw the remarkable resemblance he bore her lover.

"Of course not," said the innkeeper, who fancied himself a creature of truly wonderful discretion. "I understand, my lady. Of course he isn't. He does not look at all like the portrait. No, most certainly he does not. Ha! ha! I beg your ladyship's pardon. I will not intrude."

And still laughing behind his plump palm, he waddled up the steps and into the Cock Robin, leaving Lady Castlemaine to extricate herself as best she could.

"I told him that he was mistaken, madam, but he would have it that I was the man."

"There is a strange likeness," said Lady Castlemaine, looking at the miniature and then back again at Sir Hillary.

"On my soul," said he, admiringly, "I am truly sorry I am not the expected one. He is to be greatly envied, I am sure."

"Pardon me, sir," she replied, coldly, for she thought the lad over young for her, "but for reasons on which I need not dwell, I thought it best to give the landlord no name to guide him. Instead I show-

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ed him the portrait of the gentleman I have come to meet, but, strange as it may seem, the picture is more like you than him."

"Indeed?" cried Sir Hillary. "May I not see it, then?"

"Certainly, sir," said she, more graciously than was her wont.

"First let me introduce myself. I am Sir Hillary Grenville of Grenville Hall, and your very humble servant."

"And I, Sir Hillary, must crave your pardon if I do not make known my name."

"Very well, then," said the lad, gayly. "You shall be Lady X—the unknown. Now for the portrait."

"There is but one real difference," said her ladyship, holding the picture towards him. "This shows a man in the garb of a Puritan, with hair close cropped, while you, with your love-locks and fine clothes, would put many of our London gallants to the blush."

"I fear I am a sad coxcomb, my lady," he answered, looking at the miniature. "By St. George! It is myself."

"You can now understand the innkeeper's blunder," said she, placing the portrait in her bodice.

"'Twas most excusable," declared Sir Hillary. "May I ask the gentleman's name?"

Now this, of course, was most indiscreet, and no sooner were the words out of his mouth than he would have recalled them if he could, for the lady seemed greatly annoyed.

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"If you chance to meet him, *he* may tell you," she said, "but I have not the right."

"But," persisted Sir Hillary, "at least there can be no harm in my asking when this picture was painted?"

Lady Castlemaine's temper was always of the worst, and she was now both disappointed and annoyed at her lover's tardiness.

"Over twenty years ago," she snapped. "Before you were born most likely, *boy*."

"Gad!" said Sir Hillary, pretending not to notice the insult that concluded her ladyship's last remark. "Quarter me, if I can account for it, my lady."

"Oh," said she, in a meaningly spiteful tone, "at Court we have an easy explanation for such remarkable coincidences."

"I understand your insinuation," said Sir Hillary. "If your expected friend were here he should fight me to pay for your insult; as it is, I laugh at it, and pity a woman whose mind is so filled with vile fancies."

Bowing politely, he laid a coin on the table to settle his reckoning, and strolled leisurely to the stable, whistling gayly, while the ill-tempered lady, whom he had so coolly rebuked, swore like a Billingsgate fishmonger.

This last scene had been witnessed from the road by a slender and elegant cavalier, hardly more than a youth, who, swaying to and fro in the dizziness of intoxication, softly entered the yard of the inn, and with a bow, that under other circumstances might

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have been graceful, addressed himself to Lady Castlemaine, who would quite as gladly have welcomed the devil himself.

"Lady Castlemaine, as I live!" said the duke, thickly, for he contained much liquor that had been Captain Fortescue's.

"The Duke of Chesney!" she said, frightened and angry.

"Yes," said the new-comer, with an air of gentle and drunken sorrow. "None other. Chesney—Chesney—the unfortunate, Chesney the exile—who is rejoiced to again behold a familiar face."

Here was a precious predicament. It might not be impossible for this intoxicated youth to buy back the King's favor by exposing to him this last infidelity of his favorite. Her ladyship was more than fluttered at the prospect.

"Doubtless you are surprised to see me in this locality?" said she, racking her brain for a plausible falsehood, and in her alarm finding none.

"Mus' confess," said the duke, "that zis is hardly place I should come to were I searching for Lady Castlemaine—the beau'ful and virtuous Lady Castlemaine—whom we both love so well. Both of us—m' uncle and myself—s'help me, Peter!"

He looked at her with drunken suspicion, and, sitting down on a bench, continued:

"M' poor, poor, *poor* uncle! Don't tell me my poor, poor, *poor* uncle is again deceived by one he loves. Lady Holbrook and that undutiful dog, the Duke of Chesney, spoiled one of love's old

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dreams, 'n' 'most broke his heart. Don't tell me—oh, I implore you—don't tell me you too, m' Lady Castlemaine, have deceived my poor, poor, *poor* old uncle, *damn him!*"

With this last benediction he finished his discourse, and stared at her ladyship inquisitively.

"Your Grace," said Lady Castlemaine, "what if I tell you your suspicions are entirely groundless?"

"I shouldn't believe you," he lisped. "No woman who shines at Court as you do would ever come to such a forsaken hole as this but to meet a lover. Tell the truth, my lady, and I will keep your secret, but if you attempt to deceive me I will take pleasure in letting my uncle know what cote it is his turtle-dove flies to when let loose."

"If I trust you, I have your word of honor you will not betray me to his Majesty, or make other use of my information?"

"I swear it, m' lady," said he, with intoxicated dignity, preparing for the worst.

"I have come here to keep a tryst with a highwayman," said she, brazenly.

"A highwayman!"

"They sometimes call him Captain Jack Midnight. He pleases me rarely, for he is a man, not a scented, brainless fop!"

"Noth'n' personal is meant, I hope, m'lady?" said the duke, anxiously. "I have heard of the gentleman. He once took my watch and diamond ring from me on the Heath. Oh, I have heard of Captain Midnight."

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"I thought it probable," said her ladyship, proudly.

"So you have come here for a love-feast? What a beau'ful romance. Perf'ly beau'ful," he stammered, meanwhile deciding to hasten back to Fortescue that the troopers might capture this famous cut-purse without loss of time.

"You will not betray me to the King?" she asked, anxiously.

"Certainly not," said the duke, catching sight of the chain she wore around her neck. Reaching out his hand he seized hold of it, dragging the portrait from its resting-place on her bosom.

"What's this?" he demanded, sternly.

"Let go!" she cried, fearing that he would break the slender links.

"How dare you bid a Prince of the Blood to leg' go?" said Chesney, tightly gripping the chain.

"Your manners are shocking, on m' honor. I shall cert-n-ly have to speak to m' uncle in regard to your manners. There! You have broken it."

Sure enough, the gold chain had parted, leaving the picture in the possession of his Grace.

"Is this the rogue?" he asked.

"What if it is?" she demanded, in a great rage, and yet not daring to proceed to violence in her usual manner.

"Noth'n'," said the duke, "only I shall have him lagged and hanged for a bloody robber and my diamond ring."

"You will break your word of honor?"

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"Thass what the word of honor of a Prince is for," said he, with a drunken giggle.

"You coward!" she cried, her temper at last getting the better of her.

"Don't call me names, m' lady," said Chesney, reprovingly. "It's most impolite, m' lady."

Looking at the portrait for the first time he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, as I live!" he cried, "this is Sir Hillary Grenville. Old Fortescue was right. He said he thought this robber was some country squire. So Midnight and Sir Hillary are the same, eh?"

For a moment the woman hesitated; then, fearful lest the young nobleman should give the alarm, and being desirous that her journey should not be turned into a fool's errand, she decided that if the duke did accuse Sir Hillary the latter would have little difficulty in refuting the charge, so she nodded her head in reply.

"It is true," she said. "They are one and the same. Now give me back the picture."

"Not I," he answered. "Fortescue shall have this."

"That he shall not!" she cried, and, advancing as the duke retreated, snatched it from him as he fell backward over a bench. His head came in violent collision with a root, and he lay on the ground, stunned, as Lady Castlemaine went into the inn. She was joined soon afterwards by Carleycroft, who, muffled in his cloak, looked so like Sir Hillary as he ascended the stairs that Master Giles laughed softly to himself in the tap-room.

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“If he is not *the* man,” thought the worthy inn-keeper, “it matters little after all, for to great ladies bent on love-larking one man is quite as good as another.”

And he laughed again, for the host of the Cock Robin was nothing if not merry.

CHAPTER XIX

THE END OF PHILIP OF CHESNEY

THE bench over which his Grace of Chesney tripped so effectually concealed him from view that he reposed where he fell quite undisturbed for some little time. Slowly rising, he tried to remember why he had selected such an unsuitable spot for a nap, but, failing in this effort, decided to go in search of his ally, Captain Fortescue, that he might confide to him his wonderful discovery concerning the real identity of the highwayman at present terrorizing the neighborhood. So, with uncertain step, well filled with wine, as gay and debonair as any young gentleman had a right to be, Philip, the first and last Duke of Chesney, strolled blithely, with now and then a trip and stagger, down the highway towards the barracks through the twilight.

Mistress Charity Holliston was hastening to meet her favored suitor at a certain apple-tree midway between the house of her father and Grenville Hall, when ill-luck threw her in the path of this rakish sprig of nobility. Firmly convinced that Providence, pleased at some act of unconscious rectitude on his part, had sent this remarkably pretty damsel for

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his own personal gratification, the duke promptly seized her around the waist, and declared in no uncertain tones his unalterable intention of favoring her with his caresses. Charity first screamed, then scratched his face, and then screamed again as she beheld Sir Hillary rapidly approaching. The first intimation of the baronet's proximity had by his Grace was the grip of a strong hand on his collar which sent him reeling across the highway. When he recovered his balance, he turned around and found to his surprise and indignation that his assailant was none other than the very gentleman in whose behalf he was now laboring.

"You damned highwayman!" he remarked, in wrathful tones. "You bloody ruffian! how dare you interfere?"

"You insulted this lady," said Sir Hillary, sternly.

"Not I," said the duke. "My attentions are rated as an honor."

"Get you gone!" said Sir Hillary, "or on my word I will give you the kicking you deserve."

Chesney endeavored to fittingly reply to this outrageous remark, but in his intoxicated rage could only curse and splutter. Drawing his sword he attacked Sir Hillary, who beat him back after a little, though surprised to find that such strength of wrist and skill of fence were possessed by the slender gentleman. Not satisfied with one defeat, Chesney renewed his onslaught, and came within an inch of perforating the baronet. Now thoroughly aroused

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to a sense of his own danger, Sir Hillary foiled the infuriated youth's third attack, and, thrusting vigorously, ran him through the body.

With a scream of agony, echoed by a cry of terror from Charity, Chesney fell to the ground.

"You would have it from me!" cried Sir Hillary, regretfully.

"Yes, damn you!" groaned the duke. "Ah, you think you have done with me, you cursed highwayman, but you are wrong."

"Let me see your hurt, sir?"

"Not I. Oh, I am dying, never fear, but dead I shall be *more* your foe than living. I wish you joy of this day's work, Sir Hillary. I wish you joy, Jack Midnight. You have killed the Duke of Chesney, for I am he."

With a moan, the young nobleman fell back pale and lifeless, and lay quite still in the shadow of the gloaming as Hillary knelt at his side with an exclamation of alarm.

"My God!" he said, hoarsely, as a ring bearing the Stuart seal, worn on the youth's left hand, caught his eye. "He has spoken truly. Chesney! The King's favorite nephew. I am a ruined man."

"What will you do?" asked Charity, blanched with fear, clutching him by the arm.

"Do?" he echoed, with a terrible laugh. "Do? Why, flee for my life. That is all that is left for me."

Then, as the girl swooned and fell forward, white and nerveless, he caught her in his arms, and fled

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wildly through the dusk towards the home of Master Holliston.

Within the hour he sought safety in hiding, for Captain Fortescue found the unconscious Chesney by the road-side. Though every effort was made to preserve the life of the young prince, he lived but a quarter of an hour, and died after solemnly accusing Sir Hillary Grenville not of his death alone, but with being the notorious highwayman Jack Midnight. And it was with these lying words on his lips that as base a creature as ever drew life from Royalty passed away.

Not a week had flown by when the King offered a reward of one thousand pounds for the body of Sir Hillary Grenville, better known as Jack Midnight, dead or alive.

Book Three
THE HIGHWAYMAN AND THE BARONET

CHAPTER XX

SOME HAPPENINGS IN DEVONSHIRE

I N the records of the law courts, laid down in legal phrases, with sly questions, cunning answers, some truth, and many falsehoods, is the damning testimony that was brought against my ward. There, preserved in black and white, rests the deposition of that arch-scoundrel, Sir-Humphrey Berkely, who declared under oath that he had recognized the highwayman who plundered him as his distant cousin, Sir Hillary Grenville. The evidence of Lady Kitty Larkin also is thus preserved, witnessed, and supported by the statement of Matthew Oglivee, her coachman. In it she relates how twice in one evening her coach was halted by a masked rider, whom she identified as her former suitor, for so she now impudently styled him. Her jewels were taken from her, she swore, and though she demanded their return on several occasions previous to his flight, Sir Hillary had always affected to treat the matter as a jest. There, too, will be found set forth Captain Fortescue's suspicions of my ward, to which he gave voice in an earlier chapter, followed by a recital of his *two* encounters with the young gentleman

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on the highway on the evening that he was knocked senseless by the butt of Carleycroft's whip. To this testimony are appended the dying words of his Royal Highness, Philip, Duke of Chesney, recorded by Captain Fortescue, and, lastly, certain unwilling admissions wrung from the lips of one Lorrimer Weatherby, concerning a night ride taken by Sir Hillary Grenville on an evening when Jack Midnight was known to be abroad. If ever a net of compromising circumstances was woven around an innocent and Godfearing young gentleman surely it was here, for he was not only proclaimed far and near as the murderer of the young duke, but forced to bear upon his shoulders the odium of the accumulated misdeeds of his father's last two years of law-breaking. Fugitive and outlaw with a price upon his head, Sir Hillary hid from the world in which he had been so gay and contented a member of society, and sought shelter and refuge in the cellar of a woodman's hut which had been destroyed by fire the year before. His property was declared forfeited to the Crown, and though I sought the advice of a shrewd old lawyer, I found I could do nothing without telling the whole shameful story of Lady Clare's tragic love of years before. Since this would have deprived the lad forever of his inheritance, and was not certain to accomplish his acquittal, I abandoned all thought of proving his innocence, and devoted myself to an attempt to bring him in safety to the coast, that he might there take passage to France, where I would soon have followed him. How

HAPPENINGS IN DEVONSHIRE

Mistress Charity Holliston suffered can be easily imagined by you who have perused these pages. No woman's heart was ever made of stouter stuff or beat more truly for the man she loved than hers, and though for days she had no tidings from her luckless lover, she never faltered or lost faith. Many a time I thanked God that this blow had fallen before the betrothal of the pair was made public, for, had the truth been known, it would have subjected the little lass to much public gossip and annoyance. As it was, Sir Humphrey was the only one to watch her house, and even he had another reason for his espionage. The country was overrun with soldiery, as Fortescue's command was doubled in number for the purpose of laying the fugitive by the heels. Twice Sir Hillary vainly endeavored to thread his way through the lines of pickets cunningly placed by the fat captain, who, fully realizing that the greatest opportunity of his career had come, left no effort unmade to take advantage of it. So many times did Sir Hillary narrowly escape capture that at last, in utter desperation, he hailed the stage-coach bound from Dulverton to London, and sought by sheer foolhardiness to win his way through the heart of peril to our greatest city, thinking that from there the journey to foreign parts would be but an easy matter. This attempt was such a piece of brazen impudence that it almost succeeded. All went well until, when there was no longer imminent danger from the military, the coach was halted by Carleycroft. In the resulting scrimmage the highwayman

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killed the driver, only to be wounded himself by the sword of Sir Hillary, who, as usual, itching for fight, clambered out of the stage and attacked him on the road. By a lucky pass the lad disarmed and slightly wounded Carleycroft. Then, leaping to the box of the coach, he seized the reins and drove furiously along the highway, leaving the discomfited law-breaker swearing furiously on the road-side. Knowing he would be a marked man after such an exhibition of daring before a coach full of people, Hillary abandoned all idea of escaping by the stage, and, tying the reins to the whip-socket, swung nimbly off on the extended bough of a wayside tree, leaving the old vehicle to rumble driverless into the next town, while he again sought his burrow in the forest. Meanwhile certain incidents occurred which materially altered his plan of conduct.

CHAPTER XXI

JACK MIDNIGHT CALLS UPON A LADY

NO one was more thoroughly surprised and genuinely grieved by the sudden outlawing of Sir Hillary than a certain Knight of the Road named Gabriel Carleycroft. Not only was he shocked by the unexpected and entirely unfounded charges made against the baronet, but he felt a distinct sense of injury that the great name he had won for himself by his reckless daring on the highway should be by popular acclaim thrust upon a beardless youth who had never done aught really worthy of public adulation except kill a beggarly prince and lead a decent, orderly life. It seemed as if the fate which had in earlier years deprived him of all that most men hold dear had conspired in this later time to despoil him of his reputation, for, like all criminals, he took much pride in his far-reaching notoriety. In fact, he was so disgusted at the general idiocy of mankind that for several days he sulked in his snug room at the Grenville Arms, for here it was he made his headquarters when not in the saddle. Then, vastly interested in the hue and cry on the track of Sir Hillary, he decided to him-

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self hunt up this luckless boy, who, no doubt, was quite unable to appreciate the compliment paid him by the country folk, who believed him to be Jack Midnight. By leading the young baronet in safety to the coast he would not only perform an act laudably paternal, but by so doing would remove from his path a rival who, though unwillingly, had nevertheless eclipsed and appropriated a reputation the building up of which had taken many long years. But Sir Hillary was so cunningly hidden that even Carleycroft was unable to discover his abiding-place, and abandoning the search in chagrin, did not dare to communicate with me, for his knowledge of the methods usually followed by the representatives of the law made him certain that I would be placed under strict surveillance. After some little reflection he decided to pay a visit to Mistress Charity Holliston, whose name he has heard on more than one occasion coupled with that of his son, thinking that she would be glad to know that the laurels of highway plucking forced by an unkind fate upon the brow of Sir Hillary were most undeserved. Having arrived at this conclusion one evening, nearly a fortnight after the sudden termination of the Duke of Chesney's wild career, Carleycroft rode forth on the highway between the hours of eight and nine, and, coming without molestation within a hundred yards of the property so coveted by Sir Humphrey, leaped his horse over the hedge surrounding a field near-by. Turning the animal loose, he climbed back to the road and cautiously approached the

MIDNIGHT VISITS A LADY

house. Then, skirting the garden wall until he reached a tree so located that it made the ascent easy, he clambered over and dropped gently within the grounds.

Now for a word concerning the topography of the place. On the left, well to the rear of the hall, were the stables, now only partially occupied, while running across at the back of the house was what remained of a great vegetable garden. Much of this was now reclaimed by nature, who signalized her triumph by filling all save a tiny portion cultivated by Master Merciful Holliston himself with a thick growth of assorted and vigorous weeds. It was towards this place that Carleycroft directed his steps, and pushing his way through the weedy tangle, which in some spots rose shoulder high, advanced slowly and with great care, cautiously feeling the ground in front of him with one foot before transferring his weight from the other. To an observer he would have appeared like a man who feared lest he be suddenly entangled in the grip of a morass or quicksand. In reality, he was endeavoring to locate the position of an old well, which even before the war had fallen into disuse. Suddenly he gave a start of surprise, for he saw almost at his feet the sought-for shaft, while at the same time in its depths the flicker of a light caught his eye. Some one had been before him this evening, and was now about to emerge, candle in hand. Carleycroft drew back, and, crouching down among the weeds, waited for the other to pass, resolved to learn who shared with him the secret of the deserted well. Sir Humphrey, for

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it was he, having blown out his candle and concealed it beneath the well-curb, sauntered leisurely towards the gate as though disdaining to scale the wall, while Carleycroft chuckled quietly, and, after waiting perhaps five minutes for safety's sake, searched for and discovered the candle. Cautiously clambering down through the dark aperture by means of a rude foothold afforded by the systematic displacement of stones in the well-sides, the highwayman found himself, when he had reached a depth of eight feet, confronted by the entrance to a passage-way running in the direction of Berkely Hall.

He entered this gallery, paused, and, striking his flint and steel, lighted the candle. Leaning over the edge he looked down, and saw that some twenty feet below there was a pool of water covered over by a green scum, except where here and there the falling of pebbles cast down by him in his scuffling descent had torn open slits through which its oily blackness showed in vivid contrast.

"Devil take me, if I'd care to bathe in that!" he muttered, and turning, with the candle held well in front of him, proceeded slowly through the winding passage, which, after running to the house, a distance of some two hundred feet, began to ascend until it reached the height of the second story, effectually concealed from the suspicions of the uninitiated by an ingenious arrangement of false walls, closets, and sliding panels.

Mistress Charity Holliston occupied a large and

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commodious apartment on the second floor, which, by reason of the great height of the ceilings of the old hall, must have been between twenty and thirty feet above the ground. The room was adorned and arranged with girlish taste, sufficiently meritorious to be worthy of hearty approval, yet hardly of enough importance to justify description here. The window opened in the direction of the highway, and beneath it, partly on a great trellis, partly on the porch and walls of the house, crept and straggled a great ivy, covering the whole front with a sea of green that, when the wind blew, would ripple into little waves like some flood slowly lapping up and submerging the hall. Colonies of birds nested beneath the vines, and at sunrise the twittering would have been enough to awaken any but so heavy a sleeper as pretty Charity, who seldom rose before noon unless called by old Tabitha, which for a Puritan-bred girl was truly remarkable. The room was furnished with a great canopied four-posted bed hung with tapestry, a relic of Sir Reginald's régime, a divan, several comfortable chairs, a few which were not so comfortable, and a writing-desk on which lay a couple of quills, ink, paper, and lastly an affair like a huge pepper-pot, containing fine sand to dry the writing when done, lest it should be blotted by the folding. But the principal ornament of the room was a little maid clad in a dressing-gown of clinging gray, who lay, with her pretty face flushed and tear-stained, on the divan where she had cried herself to sleep. With her lips a trifle parted, one

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arm pillowing her head, while the other with handkerchief clasped in hand lay on her breast, the tears still glistening on her eyelids' fringe, she looked wondrously sweet and alluring. And so thought Gabriel Carleycroft as he stood gazing at her.

"A beauty," he murmured. "There be few such maids, and perhaps it is as well."

Stepping lightly to the door, he turned the key, thus insuring himself from sudden interruption, and then made his way to the window.

"The deuce!" thought he, as he perceived its unusual distance from the ground. "I would not care to jump it, though I suppose at a pinch it could be done. What luck that the maid I sought should occupy the room in which the passage ended. Now to wake her. How can I prevent her screaming? Doubtless, I will have to bully her into silence."

As he approached the sleeping girl there was a rattling at the door, as though some one with such a privilege had sought to enter. Like a flash Carleycroft vanished behind the bed-hangings, and there awaited developments. The noise at the door continued, supplemented by the voice of Dame Tabitha.

"Charity," said she—"Charity, my lambkin, are you asleep, lassie?"

Charity, only half awake, yawned, and answered, sleepily:

"Is that you, Tabby? Why do you not come in?"

"A fine question! Ay, a wise question, indeed!" scolded Tabitha. "How can I enter when the door is locked?"

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"No," said Charity, rousing by degrees. "I did not lock it."

"Quite true," thought Carleycroft, "but someone else did."

And he laughed silently as he wondered what would have happened if the elderly spinster had walked in upon him without warning.

"I care not who did it, but locked it is, or I am a married woman, which, thank Heaven, I am not," said the nurse, crossly.

"What nonsense!" said Charity, now wide awake. "I remember distinctly that I did not turn the key, you old goose. I will show you."

With this, she tried to pull the door, and found, to her surprise, that to do so was quite impossible.

"Ah, ha!" said Tabitha, triumphantly. "It is not locked, is it? Marry come up, your old nurse is no fool, though it be she who says it, who should not. Now let me in like a good girl."

Charity, greatly puzzled, obeyed, and Tabitha entered.

"How strange!" said the girl. "I took particular pains to leave it unlocked."

"Perhaps it is ghostly tricks," suggested the nurse, encouragingly.

"Oh, Tabby," said the girl, laughing as though half frightened. "What an idea!"

"They say this old house has seen many strange doings," Tabitha went on, in a thrilling whisper. "Once when Sir Reginald Berkely, who built it, was confined in this very chamber by the soldiers

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of Cromwell who took him prisoner, though they guarded both door and window, when the morning came he was gone, and they never learned how he made his escape."

"Perhaps," said Charity, refusing to be frightened, "he turned into a bat and flew away, or maybe some pretty witch, whose heart he had won, rode in through the window on a broomstick and carried him off behind her."

"I never jest on such matters," said Tabitha, severely.

"Pooh!" said the girl, laughing. "It is simple enough. The lock, no doubt, slipped back itself."

Dame Tabitha eyed her young mistress severely.

"You have been crying, girl," she said.

"And if I have, Tabby?"

"He is not worth your tears."

"I think he is," said Charity, shortly, "and if I wish to cry, I shall do so whenever I see fit."

"And ruin your eyes? When that is done, what else?"

"What use are my eyes since I never see him now?" Charity answered, softly.

"Rubbish!" said Tabitha. "If I had my way, the poets who put such nonsense into young maids' heads would pass most of their time in the public stocks."

"You are wrong, Tabby," said the girl. "It is love that inspires their poetry. You who are so religious must find fault with the One who sent them their gift of song, or hold your peace."

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"Bah!" said the old maid, feeling herself drawn beyond her depth. "Limbs of the devil, every one of them. I know them."

"But since you have never been married—"

"That is why I have not," interrupted Tabitha. "If you knew men as well as I do, you wouldn't be spoiling your good looks mourning over the just deserts of an arrant young rascal—"

"Stop!" said Charity.

She did not speak very loudly, or with much emphasis, but her tone was such that the nurse ceased her tirade abruptly.

"I should think you would be too proud to admit that Sir Hillary was aught to you."

"I wear his ring. Long before he gave it to me I resolved if he never offered me such a gift I would have none from any other. I am his promised wife, and yet you dare abuse him before me. If you ever presume to speak slightly of him again to me, I—I will run away and join him, no matter where he is."

"Mercy, what a tigress!" exclaimed Tabitha, looking shocked, for she had never seen her young mistress in such a mood before. "Marry come up, but if you did there would be a pair of you!"

"What do you know of the matter? Why do you believe Sir Hillary guilty? You, to whom he was always so kind, should be the last to think ill of him," said the girl. "Why do you not answer?"

"Ah," said Tabitha. "No doubt you know more than the King, miss."

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"I know Hillary Grenville better than any one else in the world."

"If he is so good, why does his Majesty offer one thousand pounds reward for his capture?"

"Because he killed that horrid little prince who insulted me," said the girl. "So far as robbing on the highway is concerned, the whole of it is a wretched lie. Oh, I wish I could tell the King what I think of him!"

"He would hang you for high treason, and serve you right for your pertness. No doubt he—"

Whatever the good woman intended to add to the remarks already quoted must remain forever unknown, for Charity, now thoroughly exasperated, took her by the shoulders and marched her out of the door, and locked it.

"There," said she, through the key-hole. "I will teach you to high-treason me! You can't come in here till you humbly apologize for what you have said, you old scold!"

"I will not apologize," said Tabitha, through the same aperture, in her turn. "The rascal has bewitched you!"

"He has, and I am glad of it," answered Charity. "Simply because you thought too much of yourself to gain a good man's love when you were a girl is no sufficient reason for trying to make wiser maids unhappy."

There was a moment's silence. Charity sat down, and folding her arms stared at the door, confident that the offending dame was regarding her through

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the key-hole. Another moment passed, and then Tabitha, realizing her defeat, hoisted the white flag.

"I apologize," said she, "for what I have said, but I shall *think* what I like."

"Not in here," replied Charity, uncompromisingly.

"Well, perhaps I wrong the lad," admitted Tabitha, who was at heart a worthy old person.

"As long as you have a doubt of it you shall not enter."

"Mercy!" said Tabitha. "What a tyrant it is!"

"Have you any doubt as to his innocence?"

"Not one, Charity."

"Who is the handsomest man in England?"

"Sir Hillary Grenville," promptly replied the exile.

"And the best and the most honest?"

"Young Sir Hillary."

"Ah! And now who is going to fetch a nice big piece of fruit-cake and a glass of wine for one Mistress Holliston?"

"I am," said Tabitha, and with that she waddled down the hall towards the pantry, resolved to buy her way back into favor at once.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HIGHWAYMAN AND MISTRESS CHARITY

CHARITY laughed softly as she heard Tabitha's step dying away in the distance. Then she sighed and wiped a tear from her eyes, and, lastly, gave a gasp of astonishment as the giant figure of Carleycroft, pistol in hand, stepped from behind the bed-curtains.

"One scream and I fire!" he said.

"What do you want here?" she demanded, in a great fright, though she recognized her unwelcome visitor in spite of the dim light.

"I have come to see you, Mistress Charity. On my honor I mean you no harm. Will you listen to me for a moment if I put away this pistol?"

"Yes," she said, bravely.

Carleycroft thrust the weapon in his belt.

"I believe you are a friend of Sir Hillary Grenville?" he said.

"I am to be his wife," she answered, simply.

"Then you love him?"

"Does that not follow, sir?" she asked.

"Not always," Carleycroft replied, with a chuckle. "Marriage has been to many a woman a choice method of revenge."

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"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit, Master Nabber?"

"Why," said the highwayman, "rumor has it that one Jack Midnight is none other than Sir Hillary. Fearing that you might believe such rubbish, I came here to tell you that they who say it lie. I myself am that worthy gentleman."

"You, sir?" she cried.

"None other."

"Oh, sir, you are speaking truly?"

"I swear it to you," he said, solemnly.

"Then," said she, "I will lock the door."

"You trust me?" he asked, in delighted surprise, as she turned the key.

"Ah, yes, yes. How could I doubt one who has run such a risk to bring me news of Hillary's innocence? Not that I ever doubted him, but—oh, sir, I am so unhappy, so unhappy!"

And the little maid began to cry, for stanch and true as she was, so sure were the authorities that the gay baronet and the great highwayman were one and the same person that to have absolutely convincing proof of their error thus brought to her could not but be a great relief.

"Do not weep," said Carleycroft, gently. "While your lover is at liberty there is no reason for you to despair. I have sought for him everywhere during the last week, and only set eyes upon him once, and then but for a moment."

He did not think it necessary to mention how this encounter had occurred, though a flesh-wound in his

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left arm would keep it in his memory for some time yet.

"And was he well, sir?" she asked, eagerly.

"He seemed to be enjoying good health," answered Carleycroft, with a grim smile, as he thought of the nimble manner in which Sir Hillary had clambered upon the box and driven the stage coach down the highway. "I have since looked for him that I might lead him to the coast where he could take passage to France, but, so far, my efforts to find him have proved vain."

Then, remembering another toothsome piece of scandal attributed by the gossips to the luckless Hillary, he continued:

"My weakness for female society of lofty station has led to another misapprehension. A lady, more or less well-known at Court, has seen fit to honor me with her favors, and this, also, has been laid at Sir Hillary's door."

"Ah, there, I could never doubt him," said Charity, smiling through her tears. "Master Giles, of the Cock Robin, might talk forever, and I would not listen to him."

"Why not?" asked Carleycroft, curiously.

"Because Hillary loves me, sir, and I know that he would not listen to another woman," she answered, confidently.

Carleycroft laughed softly to himself.

"A very good reason," said he, "and one I should never have thought of, I am sure. But Master Giles is not to be blamed too much for his mistake. It

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was twilight when I arrived at his inn, and certain people have said I look much like your lover."

"I do not think so," she said.

"But then you see beauties in him that are hidden to others," answered Carleycroft. "Besides, when, taking for granted that it was Sir Hillary who was with the lady from London, they attempted to arrest me for the killing of Chesney, I was so rude as to shoot one, stun another, and leave by way of the window without saying good-night to the rest, all in semi-darkness, which, to say the least, is most deceiving."

He rose as he spoke.

"I must be going," he said. "Cheer up, my lass, we are not through with this matter by a long chalk. Continue to love and trust young Sir Hillary, and I will cudgel my brains to find a way to prove him innocent. What, tears again?"

"I cannot help it," she sobbed. "You are so good and kind."

"I?" he said, in astonishment, and then he laughed silently at the very idea.

"You whom they have so greatly slandered," she continued, but Carleycroft interrupted her.

"Not so," he said, grimly. "They have lied about Sir Hillary, but they tell the truth of me, my lass, and, 'fore God, I would not have it otherwise!"

"Then why have you risked your life to comfort me?" she demanded.

"My dear child," he answered, gently, "I know what it is to love and to suffer. It was Fate's will

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that my youth's romance ended in sorrow, shame, and despair, but all these years I have cherished the memory of what true love would have made of me had I been allowed my share of earthly happiness."

"I am so very, very sorry, sir," she said, softly, laying her hand upon his arm. "Did she die?"

"Yes, she died," he answered. "Died when I was far away. Had she lived—had she been mine—this world would have been spared a ruffian, and the devil robbed of one soul more."

"No ruffian would do as you have done," she said, confidently. "I shall always pray for God to bless you as long as I live."

"Pray for me?" repeated Carleycroft, slowly. "Do not, or your God will think that you are making a jest of all that He would have you hold sacred. Good-night."

"One moment, sir," she said, detaining him. "Why are you so interested in Sir Hillary? Tell me, that I may some day repeat it to him when our time of trouble is passed by."

He looked down at her sadly, and to this day she asserts that she saw tears in his eyes as he answered her.

"*Perhaps I knew the boy's father and was his friend, or perhaps I loved his mother and in vain,*" he said. "You shall choose for yourself, little lass."

"You loved his mother and in vain," she whispered, softly. "I shall not forget it, sir."

He cleared his throat and turned to go.

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"I did not enter by the door," he said, "but I shall leave that way."

"You will be caught!" she cried, in alarm; but he paid no heed, and turning the key in the lock, strode out in the dark hall.

Charity, listening at the doorway, heard a scream of expostulation from Tabitha, who was now on her way back to her young mistress with her bribe.

"Oh! How dare you, Thomas?" cried the old dame, who fancied herself embraced by the butler, who for years had entertained notions above his station, for, as he passed her on the stairway, Carleycroft squeezed her vigorously, and helping himself to the cake she carried on a plate, ran quickly down the stairs and out the front door as boldly as any honest man. In another moment he was on horseback, galloping along the highway towards his lodgings at the Grenville Arms, which he reached in safety. After dismounting, he knocked the cake-crumbs from his jacket with his handkerchief, as finicky as a court gallant.

"It is strange," said he to himself, "what a taking way I have with me. Even the pantry suffers."

And then he went to bed.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MEETING OF TWO SCOUNDRELS

TO Ezekiel Deuteronomy Bunt, youngest son of the local miller, kings, angels, pirates, and highwaymen were upon an equal plane of elevation. Now had Master Bunt not been of a sufficiently religious nature to include the second-named beings on the list of what he considered to be really desirable professions, I would not have blamed him for being in a state of blissful uncertainty as to which held forth to him the most flattering inducements, but, as it was, there was really no excuse for his lack of decision, though I will frankly admit that Ezekiel Deuteronomy's chances for achieving success in an angelic capacity were extremely hazardous. When the country-side was raised against Sir Hillary Grenville, Deut, as he was called, felt pangs of concentrated envy. Here was a young gentleman, who certainly lived like a king, though he was not called one, and not satisfied with that must also be a highwayman. From this it may be seen that the little lad's ideas of a royal existence were a trifle vague.

"No doubt," thought Deut, "before he gets

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through he will turn pirate, and, after having all sorts of bloodthirsty adventures, become an angel."

Of course Deuteronomy was only ten, but there are many much older heads who plan and live lives hardly less reprehensible than the one he believed Sir Hillary was mapping out for himself, and still expect to arrive at the same blissful conclusion. One day Ezekiel, having fallen asleep in the sun in which he had lain himself to dry after a duck in the brook, found on awakening that twilight had begun to veil the land in a smoky haze, and if he particularly desired to join the family at their evening meal he must lose no time in returning homeward. Before he could start on his way, a tall young man, clad in what must once have been a costume both stylish and expensive, left a patch of woods which lipped the brook upon one side, and advancing quickly, came to a halt before him. With a sob of delight, the youngster recognized Sir Hillary, and realizing what must of necessity be expected of him, plunged his hands in his pockets and produced a bone whistle, a dead snail of no unobtrusive odor, a half-penny, a package of cornsilk carefully dried for smoking when in retreats of undoubted safety, and lastly, a horse-chestnut to keep away a dread complaint known as "Rutisinum," from which his grandfather, Gaffer Bunt, frequently suffered. These he gravely offered to Sir Hillary.

"That's all I've got," he remarked, in tones of sincerity. "I suppose you wants 'em, don't yer?"

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Sir Hillary, worn and hopeless as he was, could not keep back a smile from his pale lips.

"Since you are so good-natured about it," he said, "you can have all of them back except one. A dead snail is something I have always dreamed of possessing, and I certainly feel as though I must avail myself of the present opportunity to obtain such a treasure."

Now as this was really the most precious of Ezekiel Deuteronomy's possessions, he could not help sighing when he heard it selected by this great man as his toll.

"But," continued Sir Hillary, noticing the sadness of Ezekiel Deuteronomy's countenance as he contemplated the loss of the savory morsel, "if you will carry a letter for me to Mistress Charity Holliston, and promise that no one else shall get it, with the exception of her nurse, Dame Tabitha, I will even go so far as to restore this invaluable snail whose sad death is so obvious."

"Shall I swear it?" asked Deut, memories of various and hair-raising oaths flocking back in his brain as he recalled the stories he had heard of lawless individuals.

"If you like," said Sir Hillary.

Ezekiel Deuteronomy repeated a blood-curdling formula, the amazing efficacy of which was well known among the small youths of the neighborhood.

"Will you go directly there?"

"After I've had my supper," said Ezekiel Deuteronomy, who was largely made up of appetite.

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"No, before," said Sir Hillary. "Ask Mistress Charity for supper, and I warrant you to get a feast fit for a king."

Here was an opportunity to learn what particular variety of edibles were affected by royalty, and the small youth resolved to avail himself of it.

"I will," said he—"that is, if you let me live with you and help you rob and murder."

"Let me see," said Sir Hillary, reflectively. "How old are you?"

"Ten," replied this would-be outlaw, with some pride.

"Dear, dear, but that is too bad. I make it a rule not to allow any one to assist me in my crimes, who is under eleven."

"P'raps I'm eleven," said Ezekiel Deuteronomy, hopefully. "Mother has had so many she isn't quite sure, and maybe she made a mistake."

"But if that is so," said Sir Hillary, "it is equally possible that you may be only nine."

And he sighed regretfully at being obliged to refuse such a lieutenant. Then he brightened up as an idea came to him.

"I tell you what we'll do," said he. "When you are a year older we will meet again on this same spot, and if you are as large as I think you will be, perhaps we can arrange it then. That is, if you do not tell any one of our meeting."

"Not one word," said Ezekiel Deuteronomy, with emphasis, for if he let out the secret some youth already eligible, so far as age was concerned, might

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forestall him. Then, after transferring the malodorous snail, they shook hands gravely, and the future pirate, king, highwayman, and angel departed at a brisk pace in the direction of Master Holliston's abode.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BARONET AND THE LADY

AT nine Mistress Charity Holliston placed a candle in her window as requested by Sir Hillary in his letter. Almost immediately Captain Fortescue passed on the highway, and catching sight of the tiny light upon the window-sill, promptly and wisely decided that the matter was worthy of investigation, so forthwith hied him back to the barracks he had just quitted. Before another quarter of an hour had elapsed Sir Humphrey Berkely emerged from the library, where he had been engaged in earnest conversation with Master Merciful Holliston, and, as he also chanced to observe the signal, a certain line of conduct suggested itself to him, which he concluded to follow without delay. At half - past nine Master Holliston's butler closed the hall for the night, and retired to his dignified slumbers. As the last light disappeared, Sir Hillary crept cautiously along the highway towards the house of his love, little suspecting that at the barracks a score of soldiers were saddling their horses for a suddenly ordered night ride, which was to come within an ace of undoing him forever.

Aided by the trellis and vines, the young baronet

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easily reached the window of Charity's chamber, and entered the room with outstretched arms.

"My poor darling!" he said, gently, as she threw herself upon his breast with a glad cry. "You still care for me in spite of all?"

"Do you doubt me?" she asked, almost in anger.

"Not I," said Sir Hillary, and he offered her immediate proof of his affection in a manner ever popular with all betrothed couples.

"They have not harmed you, dearest?" she asked, in an anxious tone, still clinging to him.

"No, dear, and so far their efforts to find my hiding-place have failed. I would have sent you word before but I dared not risk it, Charity. Were you weary waiting?"

"Ah, yes," she sighed, happy in his embrace, "but what does that matter now that I know you are safe and well? I feared that you might be wounded or even dead"; and she hid her face upon his shoulder at the thought.

"My own true love," he murmured, "they may take from me what they will and I can laugh at them, if but you and life are left to me."

As she kissed him tenderly, he pressed her to his heart again.

"Love is all that is of value," she said, with a wondrous smile on her flushed face, while he raised to his lips the hand that clasped his own so tightly. "They may have your wealth and your lands in welcome if they give us back your life. Ah, they must, they shall, make amends to you, my poor boy."

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"And if they do not?"

"I will have enough for both of us," said Charity, "or, if you will it so, we shall be poor together."

"With you by my side, I would be rich beyond avarice; without you no beggar could equal me in poverty."

"And yet you wonder that I love you when you can say such things as though you really meant them?"

"It is the truth," he said. "Since God has deserted me, you are my religion."

"Don't," said the girl, laying her finger on his lips. "We must have faith and all will come right."

"They believe me to be a highwayman," he sighed, sinking wearily into a chair. "The King I would have given my life to serve has robbed me of all."

"He does not know or he would not do so wicked a thing," she answered. "Who can tell but when the truth becomes known he will make you a lord?"

Sir Hillary laughed bitterly as she patted his cheek with a loving touch.

"Do you not know that the age of miracles is over, or would be, if so strange a thing as your loving me had not come to pass?" he said.

"Ah, flatterer!" she cooed, with a threatening glance at him.

"Weatherby told you that my attempt to reach London failed?"

"I knew that you were still in the neighborhood," she answered.

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He started at some slight noise on the highway, only to drop back in his seat with a sigh of relief.

"What is it, Hillary?" she asked, in sudden terror.

"Nothing but my fancy," he whispered, smiling faintly, "but I start at every sound now. A man is not hunted as I have been day and night without turning half wild beast."

"How thoughtless of me to forget!" murmured Charity, reproaching herself. "Forgive me, but it was from joy at seeing you again. You are in danger even now?"

Hillary nodded as she brought him a glass of wine and a store of dainties prepared by Tabitha's willing hands, for she had trusted her nurse with the secret of his expected visit.

"Less at this moment than in many days," he answered, between mouthfuls. "Weatherby is keeping watch in the garden below by this time, for he knew that I was coming here, but he is not the only one who guards me."

"You have another friend?" she cried, clapping her hands in delight.

"So it seems. While on my way here I met a great fellow mounted on a black horse. As he had covered me with his pistol before I saw him, I dared not flee, and so, expecting naught but the gallows to end the matter, meekly waited to be led to the barracks."

"It was Jack Midnight, I will wager," interrupted Charity.

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"The very man," said Hillary, surprised that she should have guessed it. "How did you know?"

"What did he say to you?" she demanded.

"I can recall every word. 'We meet again, Sir Hillary. I have searched for you everywhere for the last fortnight. You have robbed me of much credit, and I am resolved to get you out of the neighborhood at any cost. Trust yourself to my keeping, and I will bring you in safety to the coast. Once there, if you value your life, it will be Ho! for the shores of France.'"

"Did you agree to go with him?" asked Charity, anxiously.

"I did not at first know what to say, when to my surprise he told me that he knew where I was bound, and that both my sweetheart and my guardian would vouch for my safety in his hands."

"And if that is true, what then?"

"When I leave you to-night 'twill be to ride to the sea in his company. He is waiting even now near the highway, where at the first sign of danger he will whistle the alarm."

"But your horse?" persisted the girl.

"My new friend has offered to provide one."

"Doubtless he can obtain another?" said Charity.

"Is it not so?"

"Why do you ask, darling?"

"Because," she answered, throwing her arms around his neck, as she knelt beside him, "I am going with you."

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"Ah, love," said Sir Hillary, smoothing her hair gently, "you do not understand."

"Do I not, Hillary? You are to leave England. What more is there to know but that with you goes my happiness?"

"But there would be no safety for you, my heart's treasure. If I were captured they would hang me at the cross-roads, and you?—what would the world think of you?"

"What the world thinks matters little to me," Charity answered, pleadingly. "I love you, and I will die before they shall lay hand upon you."

"All that is in woman's power you would do, I know," he whispered, with his lips pressed close to her soft cheek, "but that would not save me from death or you from shame and dishonor."

"Ah, no, no," she begged, her eyes brimming with tears. "I will be desolate without you, Hillary. Take me with you or I shall be in despair."

"But what of your father?" he asked, in a whisper. "Can you leave him? My dear one, how can I take his only child from his love and care when I have nothing—not even a life that is my own to offer her?"

Before she could reply there came a knock at the door. "Who is there?" demanded Charity, as Sir Hillary leaped noiselessly to his feet.

"It is I, Tabitha. Your father bade me ask you to join him in the library," answered the old dame. "'Tis a matter of much importance."

"What shall I do?" Charity asked, turning to Sir Hillary.

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"Go to him," said the lad. "I will wait here until you return."

"On your honor?" she said, in suspicion.

"On my honor," he answered, kissing the pout from her lips as she spoke. Then, as she went to seek her father, locking the door behind her, twenty troopers, bent on her lover's capture dead or alive, started from the barracks in the direction of the hall that had been the Berkely's, while the last of that ancient line strolled slowly up and down upon the highway with a frown on his face and hell in his heart—for he had not one doubt as to the whereabouts of Sir Hillary.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WORK OF SIR HUMPHREY BERKELY

CHARITY tripped lightly down the hall in haste to reach her father's side that she might the more quickly return to her lover. She found Master Holliston in the library, with the light turned low. He was seated in a great arm-chair, with his face buried in his hands, looking the image of despair, and Charity felt her breath come more quickly as she heard something that sounded almost like a choking sob. She knelt beside him.

"Father," she said, lovingly, "what is wrong?"

He started; then, seeing that it was she, he laid his hand upon her head caressingly.

"My poor child," he said, slowly, "your father is to-night face to face with ruin."

Charity gave a little cry, but not of fear or discouragement. Here, too, was a brave man bowed down by grief who should find in her love a greater treasure than any he had lost or ever known. Ruined? Then why might not all three of them meet in France, and there begin a new life together?

"And what does it matter, daddy, if we be rich or poor? Love is left us, and we have each other.

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"That alone is wealth," she answered, smiling up in his pale, desperate face.

"If poverty were *all*," he said, in a low tone.

She felt a sudden chill of fear at his words.

"What more is there, dear father? Confide in me, sir, and whatever the new trouble may be I will help you bear it—oh, so patiently, so bravely."

"I am sorry to disturb you at this late hour, but I could not sleep until I had seen you, my girl. It makes me miserable to burden your heart with such matters, but I have nowhere else to turn."

"To comfort you, daddy, will make me happier than I have ever been before."

He looked down at her face so beautiful in its love and bravery.

"You have your mother's eyes," he said, gently. "They were beacons in my voyage of life, and by their light I steered ever in safety. Would to God I had had her wisdom to aid me of late years. I fear I have been cold to you, Charity; severe when I should have been tender—over-harsh and dictatorial when I might have been kind."

"Ah, no, daddy, no. Do you think I could not see the love behind it all?" she whispered. "Why, it shines out through all you do, daddy. No girl ever had more to please her or lacked less in comfort or love."

Master Holliston smiled as he listened.

"I feared you did not understand," he said. "No daughter is loved more dearly—no father's heart has been more proud and happy than mine."

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"What has so alarmed you, sir? Tell me, I beg of you?"

"My daughter," he began, slowly, "you were not born when this foolish country, drunk with its own success and lacking a King, placed in the seat of Cromwell, the libertine heir of the Stuarts. In those days I was not without influence and respect. I sought to stem the tide, but found myself less than powerless. I knew that ruin must ever follow in the Stuart's wake, and I fought against the Restoration till I dared say no more. They made Charles our King, and how vilely and with what dishonor he has ruled you know, as must every one in England."

"In spite of all, the common people love his Majesty," she said, and as she spoke a strange terror crept into her heart.

"I know," Master Holliston answered, bitterly. "They do not see the poison that his sweet words conceal. To them his gayety seems true happiness, while in truth it is but flaunting, reckless lack of conscience and honor. Poor fools! Their day of understanding will come. We cut off one King's head, but Royalty is a veritable hydra, and back again into the Slough of Despond we tramp, blindfolded by the handkerchief of our monarch's lying promises, betrayed by our great King, who cares naught if no one but himself shall reach the other side, providing there be fair and dissolute women there for his amusement and disgrace."

"Are there no princes who are honest?" she asked, wonderingly.

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"I know but one who is worthy of a good man's respect—Prince William of Orange, husband of our own Princess Mary. To place him on the throne dishonored by Charles Stuart has been the dream of my old days. Acting in concert with certain other English gentlemen who shall be nameless, though I alone of us all have no great title or place in the world, I have conspired to drive the present King from England and seize the crown for the Stadtholder of Holland."

Charity gave an exclamation of alarm.

"Go on," she said. "What else is there to tell me, sir?"

"But it seems, as you yourself have said, that, rake and villain though he is, Charles is too firmly seated in the affection of the common people for us to hope for success."

"And you have abandoned the idea?" she asked, eagerly.

"We have delayed the striking of our blow. The King's health is fast failing as the result of his excesses. James, Duke of York, his brother, will succeed him on the throne, and it is at him we will direct our attack. Prince William but waits for the death of Charles to sail for England from the Hague. Ah, my daughter, a new day is dawning for Liberty—for Religion—and England!"

"Then why are you so troubled?" she asked, wondering at the enthusiasm which shone in the old man's eyes.

"Because the fate of England—the fortunes of the

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noblest prince in Christendom—rest in the keeping of a woman.”

“A woman, sir? Oh, how can that be?”

“It must be God’s will,” he answered, “though it is hard to understand.”

“And you doubt this woman? Why?”

“Because to keep our secret, she must renounce her lover, if she has one,” he said, slowly. “Or, if no man has won her fancy, learn to love a certain gentleman who would fain make her his wife!”

“He holds your lives and hopes at his mercy?”

“Absolutely.”

“And this girl’s hand is the price he asks for silence?”

“Yes.”

“Who is this man?” she cried, rising to her feet, half suspecting the truth.

“Sir Humphrey Berkely.”

“And the woman who can save you? What is her name?”

“Charity Holliston,” he murmured, hoarsely.

She started back with a low cry of mingled astonishment and horror.

“I? Why I know nothing of this affair save what you have just told me. That you received visitors from London I was aware, but of what they sought here I had no thought.”

“This hall was Humphrey’s father’s manor house. At his orders and on his plans it was built with many passages for secret coming and going. Heaven for-

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give me, I thought a knowledge of them would be valueless, but, profiting by his familiarity with every nook and cranny of the place, this noble gentleman crept through some cunning tunnel from the garden, and lay hidden in the wall while my friends and I discussed our plans, little thinking that a spy heard all. Not once but thrice he listened, and of our hopes and projects knows so much that if it is his will every gallant soul in England who has dared to join us can be dragged to the gallows to meet a traitor's death."

"He told you this to-night?" cried Charity.

"Yes, not an hour ago," he answered, hopelessly.

"Oh, why did you not kill him?"

The old man smiled sadly before he replied.

"You do not give him credit for much cunning. He has written out the story of our doings, and of all we hope some day to bring to pass. This, with an appended list of all our members, now rests under seal in the keeping of a London attorney, who, in the event of Sir Humphrey's death or disappearance, will lay the matter immediately before the King himself. He has caught us like rats in a trap."

"And he loves me and promises silence if I marry him?" she repeated, as though this sudden truth had stunned her.

"Yes," said Master Holliston, and he gave her a questioning glance.

"I hate him!" Charity said, fiercely. "The villain, the coward!"

"He insisted that I should confess all to you, or,

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Heaven knows, I would have kept it from your knowledge."

"Let him tell what he will," she cried, "and we will fly to France. We need not wait his pleasure."

"What of those who risked their lives and fortunes in this enterprise because it was of my planning?" he asked, sadly.

"You shall warn them, daddy. They, too, can find safety in sudden flight."

Master Holliston shook his head despairingly.

"They would be hunted down before they could escape, and when dragged to death would die cursing me as their betrayer."

"Then what *can* we do?" she demanded, huskily, for already duty was staring her in the face.

Suddenly she gave a low, sobbing moan, and dropped on her knees before her father.

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" she murmured, wildly. "No, no! I would rather die."

As she lay at his feet he bent over her, with tears in his stern old eyes.

"Charity?" he said.

She seized him by the hand and pressed it to her cheek, hot with grief and despair.

"You will not stay for them to kill you? For my sake you will fly while there is time?" said she.

He rose slowly from his chair, and now his face was calm again and his voice firm as ever.

"Charity," said he, "to die with those who have shared my hopes and danger is not to be dishonored,

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while the shame of the other would drag me into the grave within the year.

"Not a moment ago I pitied the woman who could save you all—pitied her and prayed that she might find courage. I could see what duty bade her do so plainly then—and yet when I know all I hesitate."

There was a pause.

"Father," she said, in quick terror, "you do not hate me? Not that, daddy! Speak to me, sir; tell me you understand and forgive me."

Master Holliston drew her to him gently.

"My dear little daughter," he said, "on my honor I would not have you answer differently. Duty to the friends who have trusted me bound me to make the truth known to you, and I could not be sure that you did not care for him until you told me. You love another?"

"Yes," she answered, raising her face to look him in the eyes. "An outlaw with a price upon his head."

"Sir Hillary Grenville? I thought as much. God forgive me for intruding my troubles upon you when you have such a great sorrow of your own. Keep your sweet self for him, my child. It may be Heaven's will to rescue him from his peril and bring you together, and since you love him, and he is innocent, as I believe, such will be my prayer. Good-night, my girl. Try to forget what I have told you."

He opened the door and stood waiting for Charity to pass through.

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"Your blessing, sir," she sobbed, and knelt before him.

The old man blessed her, and then, as she left him, turned to face his own despair, while in her heart she carried hers.

CHAPTER XXVI

SIR HILLARY BIDS HIS LOVE FAREWELL

SIR HILLARY listened to the story, with his drawn, haggard face growing sterner and sterner.

"Good God!" he said. "Who would have thought a Berkely could stoop so low?"

"He loves me," Charity said, bitterly. "'Tis thus he proves it."

"There is but one thing left for us. You shall come with me as you wished."

"Ah," she sighed, "if I *could* do as you ask!"

"You shall, Charity," he said, firmly.

"And desert my father? Abandon him to death?" she said, looking into his face with piteous eyes.

"Did he think of you, Charity, when he thrust his head into the noose? Was it for love of you he plotted? Not he; and you shall not think of him now, for I would not sell one kiss from your lips for all the kingdom, whose welfare seems to him so precious."

"Hush, oh, hush!" she cried, hiding her face in her hands. "To love you as I do is enough to suffer without such words as these."

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Hillary seized her by the arm and held her fast.

"I love you," he said, "and I say that he shall pay the price of his treason himself. His life is fairly forfeit to the Crown, and he shall not buy it back with you for ransom."

"Yet not a quarter of an hour ago you refused me when I begged that I might go with you," said Charity, turning to face him calmly, though the tears were running down her cheeks. "What has changed you in so short a time? Your honor bade you tell me to stay though you loved me. What do my love and honor demand of me now?"

"This is not the same," he answered, hoarsely. "Then it was a matter of life or death *only*. *This* is love or despair."

"And you think that my father's life should be held less than my happiness?" she asked, clutching his sleeve.

"I love you," he said, as though he knew no other thought. "I love you!"

"It is because you are dear to me that I hesitate," she whispered. "Would you care for me, Hillary, if I gave my father's life to buy our happiness?"

"As well one such sale as the other," he answered, "and you were promised to me first, Charity."

"I have been yours since first I saw you, Hillary, but I have been my father's *always*."

"Hush," he said, turning away, for he knew that she was right.

But she had no pity for herself or for him.

"If you had a sister who stood where I stand to-

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night; if on one side were her lover and happiness—on the other her father, and close behind him death—*your* father and hers whom you both loved, and to whom you were dearer than all the world—if it was thus before you, and you were chosen to decide, which would you bid her do? Go or stay?"

"Oh, God has cursed me!" he groaned, and covered his eyes with his hands.

Then, womanlike, when she had shown to the man she loved the path that honor demanded he should tread, she suddenly gave way to despair, and, losing all her courage, all thought but that she could not let him go, would have given her soul to take back the words that had made his duty seem to him so plain.

"No, no," she cried. "I cannot, I cannot!" and she threw herself upon his breast, sobbing wildly.

"Hush, my darling," he said, tenderly, holding her in a close embrace. "Thank Heaven we have seen our duty in time!"

"To love is duty," Charity said, faintly.

"Ah, yes, my dearest one, but shall we forget all else?" he murmured, as he kissed her tumbled curls. "You showed me what honor demanded of me when I wavered. The love I feel for you shall give me courage now. Recall what you said scarcely a moment ago."

"God forgive me!" sobbed the little maid. "I can remember only that I love you. Ah, Hillary, must we think of aught else? Tell me again that it is right for me to go with you, and I will not hesitate."

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"I cannot do it *now*," he faltered, though sorely tempted. "I love you too well to lie. To-night you would believe me, but to-morrow, Charity?—ah, to-morrow you would know the truth. And yet there are moments when I could forget all—sell all the world for love of you, and think you cheaply bought though honor went to make the price. Let me go, my love and dearest. Let me go, while I have the strength to say farewell."

Charity sank weeping on the divan.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she wailed.

"Charity, my darling."

"Oh, if I could die to-night!"

"Don't speak of that," he said, hoarsely. "Death seems too beautiful now."

"Or if I could cease to love you, Hillary. If I could do that I might bear it, but—"

"After a time you will forget me," said Hillary, desperately. "Time brings peace to all."

He lifted her to her feet, and she turned to him again.

"You are trying to make me hate you!"

"'Tis better so," said the lad, sadly.

"When I forget you I shall be dead," she answered. "While I live I shall love you always."

"It is breaking my heart to leave you," he said, "and yet, if I did not, you soon would doubt that I truly cared for you. Can't you see, my darling, that in every way it is best for us to part?"

"I only see that I am losing you—you who are

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my happiness. Ah, if I were brave like you!" she sighed.

"You are the bravest and truest woman in the world," he whispered, as he pressed his lips to hers.

She no longer wept; the lovelight in her eyes shone through her tears till they seemed to her lover like fragments of the rainbow, which after the storm foretells the coming of a fairer day, and he prayed this seeming prophecy might be the truth.

"We must part, then," she murmured, "just as we have learned the heaven earth becomes for those who love, though all else be lost?"

"It is Heaven's will, my darling," said Sir Hillary.

"Can it be so cruel? Ah, Hillary, a woman belongs to the man she loves," she said, pleadingly.

"If God gives her to him, Charity," he answered, like the brave and honest gentleman he was.

"God gave me to you!" she cried, holding out her arms with a pitiful gesture of entreaty.

"Not so, love," he whispered, hoarsely. "He drove me from you a fugitive."

"Ah," she moaned, in despair. "Then you leave me to that man?"

"I must give you to God's keeping," he answered, with a sob he could not beat back. "With him you are safe."

"Hillary!" she cried.

Then, as the girl fell fainting to the floor, a low whistle sounded near the highway, followed by another in the garden below.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

“THE signal!” gasped Sir Hillary.

Stooping, he laid the body of the unconscious girl upon the divan, then stepped to the window and peered out. In the distance he heard a great rattle of hoofs as though many horses were approaching, and knew he had but little time to lose. Turning to Charity once more, he knelt beside her, and taking her hand in his, kissed her again upon her lips.

“Farewell,” he murmured. “My love—my Rose of Paradise—farewell forever!”

Then he rose to his feet to find Sir Humphrey Berkely standing near him, with a sword pointing straight at his heart. For a moment the two men faced each other in silence, while Charity, to whom Sir Humphrey’s back was turned, slowly recovered from her swoon. “You are my prisoner. Move a finger and I’ll kill you.”

“How came you here?” demanded Hillary.

“By a secret passage running from this room to the garden below. The house and grounds are sur-

A FRIEND IN NEED

rounded now by Fortescue's troopers, who saw the candle in this window, and guessed it to be a signal. You cannot escape."

"It has that appearance," said Sir Hillary.

"Do you realize what it means to this girl if you are captured in her room?"

Sir Hillary cried out in horror as he remembered where he was, for in the sorrow of parting he had forgotten all but the woman he loved.

"Ah, you realize now what you have brought upon her? Why did you not think of it before?"

"You snake! If you have one drop of manly blood in your body take me out through your passage."

"And why should I do that, pray?"

"Are you not to marry the girl?"

"Then she has consented!" cried Sir Humphrey, in triumph.

"She yields to your base cunning," answered Hillary, bitterly, "but she loves me."

"So your presence here would indicate," said the other, with a sneer. "Well, now that we understand each other, I will admit I came here to lead you out on one condition."

"Name it, sir."

The clatter and jingle of the troopers' accoutrements could be plainly heard now as they rode up the drive from the highway.

"Do you give me your word of honor that you will make no effort to escape while on our little journey underground, and that when once in safety on

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the highway, you will surrender yourself to Captain Fortescue?"

"No!" cried Charity, who had now revived, and she seized Sir Humphrey's sword from behind. Like a flash Hillary had him by the throat, and forced him to his knees beside the desk.

"Now will you show me the way out?" he hissed between his teeth.

"No," gasped his cousin.

"The passage!" cried Sir Hillary.

"No, by Heaven!"

A knock on the door was heard.

"The soldiers have come," whispered Tabitha, through the key-hole. "They are resolved to search the house."

"The passage, damn you!"

"No, I tell you, no!" moaned the scoundrel, as he answered, falling back on the desk. As he lay there one hand touched the box of sand, and grasping it fiercely, he shook it in Sir Hillary's face, filling his eyes with dust and blinding him. With a low cry of pain, Hillary released his hold on his antagonist, and went staggering back, as Sir Humphrey, wild with the choking he had received, sprang forward and stabbed him in the breast. Then, as Charity rushed to Hillary's side, the coward laughed triumphantly, and touching a secret spring in the wall, vanished unobserved in the passage thus revealed, snapping the panel behind him.

"Are you hurt, love?" cried Charity, in an agony of fear.

A FRIEND IN NEED

"No, no. Has he gone? Search for the passage. Try to find the spring."

"I did not see him go," she answered, helplessly.

Master Holliston knocked at the door.

"Charity," said he, "open, my child."

"What can I do?" thought Hillary, faint from loss of blood, clutching a chair for support. "What can I do?"

"There is something wrong here!" cried a voice outside, that he recognized as Fortescue's. "Break down the door!"

"The window," whispered Sir Hillary. "Is it guarded?"

She peered out, but there was not a trooper in sight. Meanwhile a terrible battering had been begun upon the door, which, luckily, was made of oak, heavy and long seasoned, and offered much resistance.

"There is yet a chance," he muttered. "Lead me to the window!"

"What would you do there, since you cannot see to climb?" she asked, divining his desperate purpose.

"I will throw myself to the ground," he answered. "Thus your honor will be saved."

"It will kill you. You shall not!" she cried.

Hillary fought her off gently, and, guided by instinct, staggered towards the window, but his strength failed him, and he sank senseless to the floor before reaching his goal, as the door began to splinter under the attack of the soldiers, who were hammering on it lustily.

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Then there came a rasping sound, and as a panel in the wall flew open, a tall figure entered the room.

"Ah!" cried Charity, thrilled with sudden hope. "You have come to save him?"

"Yes," said Carleycroft, raising Hillary upon his shoulder as though his was but a trifling weight, "and I fancy there is little time to spare for a game of skittles."

"He is wounded," said the girl, anxiously. "You will care for him, sir?"

"As though he were my own son," answered the highwayman, striding into the passage, and when a moment later the door was burst in by Fortescue's troopers, they found Mistress Charity standing in front of the fireplace, smiling and at her ease, quite alone in the room.

"Thank you, gentlemen," she said, with a little courtesy to the stout captain. "I have lost the key, or you would have been spared this trouble."

But when they looked they found that the key was in the door, and were much mystified.

Book Four
FATHER AND SON

CHAPTER XXVIII

SOME EXPLANATIONS

TOBY CRACKER, host of the Grenville Arms, was a very disreputable person. Meanness was his most striking characteristic, and rumor had it that any piece of money held between his thumb and forefinger for the space of five minutes would thereafter bear upon each of its sides the imprint of his grip. Whether this be true or false I know not, but, at all events, no coin ever fell from his grasp. Master Toby was so stingy that he starved himself until his bones seemed as though about to break out in protest through his leathery hide, for the seamed and yellow epidermis that bound him could not be called a skin. The crowning sorrow of his life was that custom had made the wearing of clothes a necessity, for clothes, after a time—a very long time, 'tis true, but even at that, twice too soon—wore out even if they never needed washing. Washing he found was very bad for garments, and as a little dirt more or less harmed no one, he dispensed with ablutions entirely. Nevertheless, the old inn was neatly kept, and, save where the ravages of time laid their mark, was but little changed since the pass-

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ing away of Master Killigrew. Toby knew and admired Jack Midnight, and always kept at his disposal the best room of the house, but when he heard of Sir Hillary Grenville's flight, and learned the enormous reward offered for his arrest, his avaricious mind applied itself to the task of evolving a scheme to trap the young aristocrat, for Toby at heart was anarchy personified, and loathed all whom he knew to be his betters. Therefore his surprise and delight may be readily imagined when one night, shortly before dawn, his most valued patron arrived at the inn, accompanied by a young gentleman whom he at once recognized as the fugitive baronet. He quickly resolved that the reward offered by the King should be added to the store of gold pieces he had already laid away, but, realizing fully that the affair was a ticklish piece of business, and one which required careful handling, he pondered long and earnestly before taking any steps in the matter. There was no especial need of haste, for once safe beneath the eaves of the Grenville Arms Carleycroft dressed the young gentleman's wound in a manner worthy of a professional, and insisted that, until the strength drained from the youth by loss of blood should be restored, no further attempt to reach the coast could be undertaken, and with both gratitude and wonder Sir Hillary obeyed his new friend, and became his guest at the old inn, where he was given a comfortable room in the garret, and fully instructed in a certain mysterious method of gaining a retired and very cleverly concealed retreat in the huge chimney, which was to be resorted

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to only when soldiers or constables were in dangerous proximity. Carleycroft made the mistake of believing that any outlaw would be accorded the consideration and fidelity of the landlord, when in reality he himself was the only person who had ever enjoyed the devotion of that attenuated individual. At all events, within the fortnight Captain Fortescue agreed to share the reward to be given for the capture of Sir Hillary with Master Toby, and this alone proves conclusively that the attempt to seize the poor lad was instigated by the man who was trusted so implicitly by Carleycroft. Of this more anon.

Sir Humphrey's murderous assault on my ward in the room of Mistress Charity will no doubt be easily recalled to mind, and, as not more than a minute or two elapsed between the exit of the treacherous rascal and the timely arrival of Carleycroft, a word or so to explain the former's subsequent inaction that evening will not be out of place here. Carleycroft, who from his lookout on the highway was the first to discover the approach of Fortescue's troopers, quickly realized that something of an extraordinary nature was going on in the house of Master Holliston, or surely Sir Hillary would not have waited for the premises to be surrounded by the soldiers before endeavoring to escape. Turning his horse loose as was his custom, he made his way with all speed to the old well, and started along the passage towards the room of Mistress Charity. He groped his way as best he could in the dark, for the candle-end was not to be found when he looked for it, and had covered about

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two-thirds of the distance when he perceived the glimmer of a tiny light rapidly approaching. A moment's thought convinced him that this person could be none other than Sir Humphrey, and as it had been effectually proven to him that this young gallant was one of his son's bitterest enemies, he decided that his presence in the passage at this particular time boded no good to Sir Hillary, and took steps accordingly. As Sir Humphrey hurried towards the outlet of the passage-way his candle was suddenly knocked from his grasp, while immediately afterwards a smashing blow on the chin, delivered with the full strength of Carleycroft's right arm, deprived him of all interest in events of the evening—a state of blissful indifference which lasted until dawn had come to prepare for the rising of the sun, and when at last, slowly and stiffly, and with discolored face and soiled garments, Sir Humphrey emerged from the old well, Carleycroft and Sir Hillary had for hours been snugly stowed in the Grenville Arms, and Fortescue in chagrin and disappointment had ridden back to the barracks with his troopers.

Sir Humphrey was confined to the house for several days with his swollen and discolored face, and it was only natural that he should devote much of his time to speculating as to the identity of his unknown assailant. So far as he knew, Carleycroft and he were the only persons familiar with the passage, but this of course was not certain, and he could see no reason for the highwayman attacking him, since they had already driven one bargain, the exe-

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cution of which had been rendered unnecessary by Sir Hillary's flight. When he learned the result of Fortescue's forced entrance into Mistress Charity's room, he promptly decided that I had been told the secret of the well by Carleycroft, and was entirely responsible for his bruised face and the escape of Sir Hillary, which of course did not tend to increase his regard for one Lorrimer Weatherby, but for that I cared not a snap of my finger. As the escape of my ward had prevented any disgrace becoming attached to the name of Mistress Holliston, he concluded to press his claim as before, and as soon as presentable called upon Master Merciful to learn his daughter's decision from her own lips, and was both pleased and surprised to hear that she had accepted his proposal. The aspect of the whole affair was so entirely satisfactory to Sir Humphrey that when the young lady requested a month to prepare for the wedding, he readily consented, and returned to his lodgings at Tiverton to ponder on various schemes for the apprehension of Sir Hillary, whose capture he was now more than ever desirous of effecting.

Meanwhile two letters, which he had recently despatched to his Most Christian Majesty, Charles the Second, announcing the flagrant infidelity of Lady Castlemaine, were affording his Royal Highness and, also, an extremely witty and most immoral gentleman, Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, much food for thought, and the chance for many acrimonious discussions. The result of this was that when next Lady

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Castlemaine was obliged to absent herself from the Court, this time because of the sudden indisposition of her grandmother, the King became afflicted with a toothache so severe that he was compelled to shut himself up in his private apartments, his sequestration being shared by Buckingham only.

Now while most people may be totally unaware of the remarkable efficacy of travelling at top speed in a closed carriage both day and night as a cure for aching jaws, I feel that so valuable a remedy should no longer be kept from the public, and therefore cheerfully bear witness to the effect that such treatment enjoys the endorsement of royalty, for it was certainly followed by his Majesty on this occasion.

Truly kings have strange ideas, but then we common people have strange kings, and are therefore not entirely unpeccable ourselves.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIR HUMPHREY BERKELY PREPARES A WELCOME FOR HIS LAWYER

ON an evening some two weeks after Sir Hilary received his wound, Sir Humphrey Berkely, in no little alarm, sought an interview with Carleycroft at the Grenville Arms, not suspecting that the same hostelry was now honored by his cousin's presence, or that his assailant in the secret passage had been none other than the highwayman himself. I believe that it is not impossible for one serpent to kill another with its venom, and our gallant sailors tell many strange tales of man-eating men who dwell in distant isles of the sea and in America, also, if my memory does not play me false, but surely no more striking example of kind feeding on kind can be found than in the case of the London attorney to whom Sir Humphrey had intrusted the documents concerning the Holliston conspiracy. This rapacious and conscienceless rogue did not go so far as to break the seal upon the papers placed in his keeping by his Devonshire client, but instead indited a letter to him setting forth how extremely desirable it would be for Sir Humphrey to favor his

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lawyer with five hundred pounds, this being, as he stated, about what he could get for the surrender of the precious bundle to the authorities. "For," wrote he, "if anything smells to heaven of conspiracy and high treason, surely it is your mysterious behavior."

Sir Humphrey quite justly felt outraged at the dishonesty of this legal gentleman, but there seemed to be only one way out of the difficulty, and it was in reference to the affair that he sought the advice and services of Jack Midnight.

He found him sitting in front of the fireplace, for the evening was chilly after a heavy rain, and a log or two blazing on the hearth added much to the comfort of the inn. With a pipe between his teeth, and the usual decanter of brandy at his elbow on the table, Carleycroft was temporarily quite at peace with the world, and nodded politely when Sir Humphrey entered.

"A bit of work to be done, young sir?" he said, questioningly.

Sir Humphrey pulled a chair nearer the fireplace, and sat down at his ease.

"Yes," he answered; then, as old Toby toddled into the room in search of custom, Humphrey bade Carleycroft send him away. Toby was instructed by the highwayman to remove himself from the immediate vicinity, and also, in a lower tone, to bid Sir Hillary keep out of sight. When the old reprobate, for he was naught else, was safely out of earshot, Sir Humphrey helped himself to a drink of the brandy, and hastened to explain the object of his coming.

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"It has to do with a lawyer," said he.

"A devilish sly lot," observed Carleycroft, "for if I am bold enough to take what I *need* on the highway, think how much more cunning they must be, since they take what they *want*, and then rest themselves in the shadow cast by the judge's bench."

"Your antipathy is but natural," said Sir Humphrey.

"Just so," replied Carleycroft. "I cannot have dealings with them, for I am sure they would be the death of me in one way or another." And he chuckled so gleefully over this sorry jest that the smoke mistook the way of exit and started in the wrong direction, which made necessary a copious libation of brandy to restore his comfort. "Never," said he, "have I seen any reason for the existence of insects, lawyers, and old women. An unreasonable lot, on my word, and backbiters all of them."

"I quite agree with you," Sir Humphrey said. "Only a few days ago I had an unpleasant proof of the duplicity of the legal gentry. Having placed in the hands of my London attorney certain documents—"

"Oh, ho!" thought Carleycroft. "His hold on Holliston," for Sir Hillary now trusted his new friend implicitly, though he had no thought of the ties that united them.

"I have just been notified by him that he suspects them to be of a treasonable nature, and demands that I pay him a prodigious amount or he will bring the matter before the King himself."

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"Truly," said Carleycroft, "I shall send for that worthy gentleman, and take him into partnership."

"I have written accepting his proposition, but, *owing to my being ill in bed with a fever*, and his great apparent necessity for money, he will bring the papers to Devonshire," said Sir Humphrey, with a wink.

"Where you will get him quickly knocked on the head? Fitting reward for such a slippery rogue."

"You remember, doubtless, that shortly previous to the exposure of my cousin's methods of amusing himself we had some little business arranged?"

"Just so," said Carleycroft. "You wish the same understanding in regard to this attorney?"

"The less chance you give a lawyer the better," said Sir Humphrey, "so be even more careful."

"Oh, we will fight it out fair enough," answered the highwayman, who for the last fortnight had known no excitement worthy of the name, and chafed under his inaction. "When does our legal friend come to Devonshire?"

"He will arrive at the Cock Robin to-morrow afternoon. I will make an appointment with him to meet me here at nine in the evening. You must settle his business for him on his way hither," said Sir Humphrey, and he swallowed some more brandy. "He will carry the papers in his infernal bag, for I bade him bring them, and swore, if he did not, I would do no business. Damn such a villain!"

"Amen," said Carleycroft. "May the devil get his own!"

BERKELY PREPARES A WELCOME

With this pious remark, Carleycroft poured a glass of brandy for his guest, took one himself, and the two drank speedy confusion to all legal luminaries and those associated in their careers of crime. When Sir Humphrey had gone Carleycroft sat staring at the fire for some little time.

"Egad," he said to himself. "'Twould be droll if, after all, it is I who obtain the lad's pardon. I will tackle the attorney, but, if my subsequent behavior does not entitle me to rank high in legal circles, may I never halt another coach!" And he never did.

CHAPTER XXX

TWO GENTLEMEN FROM WHITEHALL

MASTER JOSIAH WINTERBOTTOM, attorney-at-law, small, thin, without a conscience, and with a courage as desperate as that of any swashbuckler, arrived at the Cock Robin Inn the following afternoon. At half-past eight, with his precious bag under his sleeve, he set forth for the Grenville Arms, while, almost simultaneously, Carleycroft rode out of the stable and cantered down the highway to wait for his coming. And Captain Fortescue, having received certain information from Master Toby Cracker concerning the whereabouts of one Sir Hillary Grenville, began to make ready for a strategic descent upon the inn that had the honor of sheltering him.

Meanwhile a closed carriage drew up before this last-named place of entertainment, and two bravely attired gentlemen alighted with a celerity that made plain their joy at leaving such irksome quarters. One of these gallants was sallow-complexioned, and had dark hair, and brown eyes that were large and handsome. He was about five feet ten inches in

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height, and carried himself with ease and grace. He had a voice which was both powerful and mellow, and, while one might think from a first glance at his rather harsh and saturnine face that he must be a man of evil temper, the twinkle that now and then came into his eyes would have quickly dispelled such a mistaken idea.

The other, who was about the same age, was a blond, and by far the handsomer of the two. His face was oval and rather long, with heavy curving eyebrows shadowing sleepy, yet glistening, eyes. His lips were thin and compressed, while a lengthy and well-formed nose overhung his mustache. The figure of this dashing cavalier was beyond criticism, and his manner was easy, merry, and elegant.

In two strides they reached the door of the inn, and entering, rapped loudly for Master Toby, who quickly appeared, rubbing his skinny old hands at the prospect of much profit.

"Is this the Inn of the Grenville Arms?" asked the dark-complexioned gentleman.

"The *celebrated* Inn, you mean," corrected his companion, gayly.

"This is the place, good masters," squeaked Toby Cracker.

"And you are the host? Something tells me that you are. I feel a premonition, or is it second-sight that so convinces me, your High—"?

"Silence, you fool!" interrupted the dark galand. "You are the owner, sir?"

"Do not deny it," broke in the gay gentleman.

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"'Struth, I won't believe you if you do. Damme, none but a proprietor would be tolerated about a tavern in such a villanous state of disrepair."

"I am the landlord," said Toby, a trifle confused by the raillery of the light-hearted spark.

"Doubtless 'twas you who built the place, grandfather?" said the giddy fellow.

"Not I, sir. It fell to me when Mistress Killigrew was taken off with the water colic ten years ago last Whitsuntide."

"Alas, poor woman!" cried the gentleman, pretending to wipe his eyes with his lace handkerchief. "We ne'er shall see her like again. Excuse these tears, Charles, but I feel I cannot longer control my grief."

And with that he staggered over to his friend and flopped his head down upon his breast, thereby damaging his lace collar considerably, and securing a hearty slap for his reward.

"You fool!" said the other. "Od's fish, had I known that you would prove so silly I'd have brought Jermyn with me instead."

"Pooh! That short-legged, big-headed heart-breaker! He would have done nothing from Whiteha—from—er—from there to here but retail the story of his conquests," retorted his friend.

"While you have laughed and drunk all the way like a silly ass," said the more serious of the two.

Then, turning to old Toby, he said: "We will stop here to-night. Wine—your best vintage, fellow. Stay! one question, sirrah. Have accommo-

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dations been engaged here for a lady coming from London, who will arrive to-morrow?"

Toby gave him a shrewd glance, and then prepared to lie, but was prevented by hearing the clinking of coin in the pockets of his questioner.

"Many ladies come from London, sir," said he, evasively.

"Ah, but there is no mistaking this woman. She has been in this neighborhood before. Tall, with great brown eyes, golden hair, and a damned, mocking, innocent mouth."

"A splendid description, on my soul!" cried the gentleman who had been rebuked for his merriment. "A word-painting correct in every detail, or I am a psalm-singer, but then, Charles, who should know her good points better than you?"

Then, suddenly remembering, he added: "Unless it be Jack Midnight."

"Your tongue will drive me mad, George!" cried the dark gentleman. "Do you expect such a lady, Master Landlord?"

"Why do you ask, sir?" said Toby, craftily.

"There are many reasons," replied the gentleman, drawing a handful of money from his pocket. "See! Six separate golden reasons."

As he spoke, he counted out six guineas on the table before him.

"Since such is the case," said Toby, clutching the money with his dirty fingers, "I am glad to say that the lady will reach here to-morrow."

"You have reserved her lodgings?"

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"She will occupy the bridal-chamber, of course," interrupted the irrepressible wag, who was warming his hands at the fire. "And remember, fellow, that you say no word to any one of our questions, or mention our presence here."

"Are there good reasons for that, also?" quavered Toby, anxious to add to his store of guineas.

"Yes," answered the blond, leaving the fire and seizing him by the arm. "Three. Because silence is golden, and you love gold, or I misjudge you sadly. Because a still tongue makes a wise head, and wisdom is an appropriate accompaniment for your bald pate and gray hairs, of which I can count almost two. Lastly, because, if you breathe a word concerning us to any one, I will take great pleasure in breaking your damned, miserly neck!"

"I hear, sir—I hear!" cried Toby, in a great fright. "Not one word will I speak."

The cavalier released him, with a laugh, and the old rascal hobbled away to fetch the wine.

"Well, Sire," said the Duke of Buckingham, "we are here at last."

The King drew a chair to the table and sat down, while Buckingham dropped lazily into another, for he seldom stood upon ceremony in his private doings with his Majesty.

"You are sure that was Lady Castlemaine's coach we passed?"

"I will swear to it, Sire. Her ladyship is some twelve hours behind us upon the road."

"Fancy her surprise when we disturb her in her

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love-nest with this Sir Hillary," said the King, smiling bitterly.

"Oh, ho!" laughed Buckingham. "I can imagine her face. I will wager a diamond the size of a hazelnut she will manage to appear innocent, no matter how we catch her. Zounds, sir, you do not look merry. Hang it, can't you laugh once in a while?"

"You must pardon me if I say I do not perceive the delicious humor of the affair," said his Majesty.

"And why should you be sad? What if Bab does forget her duty occasionally? Have you not Lady Holbrook to comfort you, and little Nell Gwynne, and numerous others? Why, man, you have no more right to complain than the Grand Turk."

"It is not pleasant to have a rival, even if he is a famous cut-throat."

"Pooh!" said his Grace. "Cheer up, your Highness. Sir Hillary Grenville is considered in these parts to be the handsomest man in England, so, now that we know Jack Midnight is his stage name when he plays at stopping coaches, you should congratulate yourself her ladyship did not insult you by falling in love with some damned, hideous scoundrel."

"Shall we seize him to-morrow? We could, no doubt," said the King.

"Oh, devil take it, no!" said his Grace. "I am no thief-catcher. Your soldiers or constables will lay him by the heels some day. At least I fear so. Until then let us not grudge him his liberty, for, 'fore God, Sire, his impudence entrances me. You put a price

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on his head, and he gets even with you by sending for Lady Castlemaine to join him here, and in her caresses finds balm for the hurt your reward has done him. 'S'oons! his insolence is sublime. Egad, Sire, we should have him at Court."

"I know one court that will make short work of him," said the King, pouring out the wine which Toby had brought. "You can go, fellow."

As Toby left the room he continued:

"I trust Lady Castlemaine's *sick* grandmother will soon be recovered."

"I fancy," said Buckingham, "that *he* will be well enough to receive company to-morrow."

"Yes, curse him!" said the King.

"By-the-way, who is the fellow who wrote you of her ladyship's misconduct?" asked his Grace.

"I did not bring the letters with me, and the name has quite slipped my memory."

"So he is a *poor man*?" said Buckingham, meaningly, but the King took no notice of his impudence.

"His first letter spoke of meeting the couple at Dulverton; the second that her lover was Sir Hilary, and made his headquarters here. Then came the killing of Chesney, poor lad, and for a while I forgot the matter."

"Until Lady Castlemaine's grandmother had another spasm, whereupon we slipped away from Whitehall together, and, passing her ladyship on the road, arrived at her destination half a day before her. Od's oons! What a jest!"

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And the merry nobleman laughed until he choked, in spite of the King's sour face.

"It is infernally funny, of course," said his Majesty, crossly. "What a silly laugh you have, George! Like the cackle of an industrious hen."

"Ah," said his Grace, "but it sounds well when you insist on retelling all your old stories of privation and adventure, does it not?"

The King smiled in spite of himself.

"There is a place for everything," he said, sipping his wine.

"Then let me propose a toast immediately, for no place will be more appropriate, I am sure," said the duke, rising. "To Grandmother," said he. "May *he* speedily recover, for the sake of Barbara. If he doesn't he will hear some remarkable swearing, eh, Sire?"

"Lady Castlemaine's vocabulary is not the least of her charms," asserted the King, who dearly loved a little Billingsgate now and then, and could always rely on her ladyship's powers of vituperation.

At this moment Sir Hillary entered the room.

CHAPTER XXXI

HILLARY GRENVILLE, BARONET AND ROYALIST

THE lad was still pale and weak from his wound, though Carleycroft, whose skill in such matters had proved to be considerable, assured me that he was making really amazing progress towards recovery. He had but just awakened, and, believing the inn deserted, entered to find himself the object of a keen scrutiny from the eyes of two well-dressed gentlemen drinking before the tiny fire. As to retire abruptly might excite suspicion, he decided to remain, and, crossing, sat in the chimney-corner.

"Gad zooks!" said his Grace of Buckingham, "who have we here?"

"Sir Hillary Grenville, I will wager," whispered his Majesty, who was nobody's fool except a woman's.

"Nonsense, Sire," answered Buckingham. "This is a sick man; look at his pale face and uncertain gait. He is as white as my ruffles or the skin of Lady Castlemaine, if not her conscience. This is no gallant in eager expectation of a lady's favors."

"You cannot always judge from appearances," said his Majesty, doubtfully. "Some men are the devil when it comes to women."

"And most women are the devil when it comes to men," retorted Buckingham, who did not lack for experience. "Come, now, Sire, answer frankly. Do you think Lady Castlemaine is the dame to invite a sick man to a love-feast? Not if I know the lady, which I fancy I do."

"You are right, George," said the King. "The vixen would not willingly."

It was at this point I entered the inn, having walked in a circle of at least a league in circumference to throw suspicion from the place, little thinking that old Toby had already sold Sir Hillary into the hands of Captain Fortescue for a half share of the offered reward, and in expectation of the coming raid even now was preparing to absent himself.

I found the boy staring into the fire, with his chin in his hands, quiet and sad as he had been ever since the night in Mistress Charity's room. The two gay sparks, who smelled of Court if ever gallants were so marked out from the ordinary, were whispering together at a great rate, and a suspicion that they were in little doubt as to Sir Hillary's identity entered my mind at once, but the mischief, if mischief there was, already had been done, so, as it was only two to two, I had no fears for the result, though my ward was in poor condition to fight for even so precious a possession as life. As I stepped to the side of Sir Hillary I heard one say to his comrade:

"'S'oons, another! The Grenville Arms does a flourishing trade."

Immediately afterwards the taller of the two came

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swaggering over to hold a long sliver of wood in the blaze that he might light his pipe with it, but in reality, as I at the time thought, merely to furnish an excuse for engaging us in conversation.

"Your pardon, sirs," said he, smiling pleasantly enough, as he thrust the splinter into the blaze. "A cold night for this time of the year."

"Truly, sir," I answered, wondering where I had seen his face before, as it seemed strangely familiar.

"And a dull evening for us all," he continued. "What think you of a game of cards to pass the time away? Will you 'take a hand?'"

"Gladly," said Hillary, weary of his own thoughts, and no wonder, for in three days he was to start for France. In another week Sir Humphrey would have Mistress Charity for his wife, and even now the old hall was the scene of active preparations for the wedding that would bring the last of the Berkelys into his own again.

No introduction was asked or given, and we let the strangers choose their own game after I had given old Toby a guinea to keep an eye out for the coming of others to the inn, thus making it possible, as I thought, for the boy to enjoy the diversion with but little additional danger. We played carelessly enough, all four of us searching for amusement with scarce a thought of gain, and, after a little general chatter, the blond cavalier, whose face I knew I had seen before and at no remote time, said:

"Is it true Sir Hillary Grenville is still untaken?"

The lad was dealing, and as I watched him my old heart grew proud, for his hand showed no tremor or twitch as he tossed the cards.

"Grenville?" I repeated. "Where have I heard that name?"

"Surely, sir," said Hillary, "you have not forgotten our unfortunate young neighbor, who fled the country for killing the Duke of Chesney?"

"Gods' oons!" I exclaimed. "Poor lad! How foolish of me not to remember."

"Ah!" said the dark cavalier. "He fled because he feared exposure as a murderer and robber doubly dyed. Chesney had discovered his secret, and paid for his knowledge with his life. Sir Hillary lived in seeming honesty and was respected by all, who little thought him a bloody highwayman."

"But," I interrupted, "is it not possible for his Grace of Chesney to have been mistaken? I, for one, do not believe Sir Hillary and Jack Midnight to be the same person."

"No?" said the gentleman who had spoken before. "You, sir?" and he nodded towards Sir Hillary. "What do you think about the matter?"

"I share my friend's belief. It so chanced that these two men were of the same height. When masked one might readily be taken for the other, and all the rest be a foul trick played by Fortune on the poor devil."

"Then," said the dark-complexioned cavalier, whose deal it now was, taking the cards, "if Sir Hillary is innocent of wrong-doing, why does he not

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hunt down this pestiferous robber whose presence in Devonshire has so ruined him? By doing this he would prove his innocence conclusively."

"Because," said Sir Hillary, carelessly—"and I know whereof I speak—when all the world, except one old friend and fellow of his and a loving, trusting woman, declared him a thief, this Captain Midnight saved him from death, the woman from disgrace and shame, and risked his own life to bear Sir Hillary from danger. Could he betray such a friend as that? Egad, that would be gratitude."

"Of the usual kind," said the blond gentleman, twisting his mustache. "I fear Sir Hillary would be but a sorry courtier if he lets obligations of any kind bother him. Eh, Charles?"

"I must confess I share your opinion," said the cavalier so addressed.

"So far as the death of Chesney is concerned," I put in, "he was attacked and killed in the dusk, and alone. Who know but what this highwayman was guilty of that crime also?"

"It is not impossible," said Charles. "And, from what I know of the King, if it were so I am sure his Majesty would gladly pardon Sir Hillary if, with his protestations of innocence, he brought to Whitehall the body of this celebrated outlaw. Without such proof I fear he stands but little chance of pardon."

The other stranger looked at Sir Hillary sharply.

"Have you ever been to Court?" he asked.

"Not I," said Hillary, with a smile. "I' faith,

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with Grammont and the Duke of Buckingham to lead him on, the King has quite enough wild blades to provide his mischiefs without my volunteering advice and assistance."

The dark-browed gallant frowned, while his friend laughed and then scowled, only to laugh again.

"So you share the common belief that his Majesty is a disreputable rake and libertine, without a single virtue to set off his faults the better?" said the more sedate of the two.

His comrade spoke up at this, and began to abuse the King in no measured terms, and with seeming knowledge of much that went on within palace walls.

"I consider this Stuart rake a foul disgrace to a noble country," he stormed, pulling at his mustache as he spoke. "He flaunts his amours in the people's faces, and bids them kiss the feet of women unfit to tie a fish-wife's bodice-strings. A pestilential prince say I—a drunkard—a liar!"

The table came within an ace of turning over as Sir Hillary sprang to his feet, with his face a burning red.

"Sir," said he, "no man can villify my King before me unrebuked! My father fought for his father; courage, wealth, and loyalty were bequeathed to me by a man who honored Royalty above all else. Take back your words, or by Heaven, sir, you shall eat them from off my sword-point here and now!"

We were all on our feet together, each man with his hand upon his sword-hilt, and Sir Hillary, now

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that anger had spent his strength, was obliged to clutch his chair to keep from falling.

"And why do you defend him?" sneered the gay gentleman, yet all the while keeping his eye cocked in the direction of the dark-skinned gallant. "What else have you to offer in his behalf but violence? I will fight you fast enough, never fear, but first explain the excuses you would make for his Majesty."

"There are men born kings and others, who, though kings by birth, are more like common men," said the boy, bravely. "Charles Stuart is a gentleman, and none can gainsay it. If he is not a great ruler—and mind you that he is not is more than I can see—he, at least, is a brave and merry cavalier. The King may be no Puritan, but then neither are you nor I, so that does not matter. What if he is gay and easy of morals? No woman has ever cried of shame on his account. Not they, sir. They take the hand he holds to them and care not one whit whether it be the left or the right. Then who is to blame? He is a good fellow, I tell you. Why, damme, if I had half his chance I would be a devilish sight worse I am sure."

With this he would have fallen backward for very weakness had I not seized him by the arm and set him in his chair.

"Od's fish!" cried the swarthy stranger. "Right nobly spoken, on my honor as a—as I live!"

Then, turning to his friend, who had handed me the brandy from another table, he said:

"Egad, George, I fancy you had best retract your

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words. This gentleman is not fit to fight, and all else but an apology will wrong a gallant youth."

"Sooner than put you to inconvenience while so weak," said this gay spark, good-temperedly, "I will fight your friend."

Now this suited me well enough, but the other gentleman would not hear of the idea, so we declared peace; for the offending gallant withdrew his attack upon the King unconditionally, and we drank his Majesty's health together.

Then in a moment or two they departed from the inn, vowing that they had drunk so much they had need of air, and I, still full of suspicion, crept cautiously after them. In less than a quarter of an hour I started back towards the Grenville Arms at my best pace, for the country was alive with soldiers. Before I had covered half the distance I heard two shots fired, and the sound of a horse coming down the highway at breakneck speed. For once Fortescue was up and doing. The troopers were closing in on the old tavern from every direction.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW MASTER WINTERBOTTOM MET JACK MIDNIGHT

AFTER Carleycroft left the stable of the Grenville Arms to go in search of the lawyer, who had so absolutely disregarded all the traditions of his profession, he rode as far as a great elm that stood nearly half-way between the two taverns, and there beside the hedge, masked and cloaked, for the evening was quite as chilly as the night before, waited with the patience of long experience for the coming of his game. The shadow cast by the thick foliage was so dark that the figures of horse and rider, black from top to bottom, were only perceptible to the keenest scrutiny, and several yokels passed by on the road blissfully ignorant that they had been within easy pistol-shot of the famous highwayman.

At last came the little attorney, sitting his fat cob like a toad on a rock, his bag of papers clutched under his arm, and a long pistol in his pocket, on the butt of which his hand had rested from the moment he got beyond earshot of the Cock Robin.

“Stand and deliver!”

The little lawyer drew his pistol and fired point blank at Carleycroft, hitting him in the breast. Con-

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scious that he was terribly hurt, the highwayman fired in his turn, and the cunning, evil brain of Master Josiah Winterbottom was bored through from front to back by a bullet that brought the pumping throb of his plucky little black heart to a sudden end. Carleycroft leaped from his saddle and staggered towards the form that lay on the road as vividly outlined in its dark garments against the pale yellow of the dust as the ace of spades on that plainest of cards in a new pack. He fell before he reached it, half rose, and fell again. Red flashed before his eyes, and he choked and spat blood as he lay there. Then he heard, as though far off, though in reality near at hand, the voice of a child cry in accents of delight:

“I seen a murder! I seen a murder!”

A little form sped towards him and seized him by the shoulder.

“The soldiers are coming!” he said, in his shrill treble. Then, catching sight of Carleycroft’s face, he cried, starting back, “Why, it isn’t Sir Hillary!”

“No, child,” gasped the highwayman, “not Sir Hillary, but his friend.”

“Are you?” said Deuteronomy. “You’ll be taken if you stay here.”

With a low whinney of unrest and alarm, the faithful horse advanced to where his master lay, as the bundle of papers, wrapped round by the bag of the dead attorney, caught Carleycroft’s eye. It lay beside the corpse of the little lawyer, with the strings still clutched by his stiffening fingers; and in the distance sounded the hoof-beats of a body of troop-

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ers rapidly approaching. If he could get the documents and then mount his horse, Carleycroft knew he might trust all to the intelligent animal. He set his teeth and made the effort. Little by little he rose to his knees, with the trampling of the soldiers' horses growing louder and louder. He tried to stand erect, but fell forward on his hands with a groan.

"Lean on me," said Deut, bravely, for he felt akin with all law-breakers.

Gripping the boy's shoulder, Carleycroft managed to stand, but he realized it was beyond his strength to reach the side of the man he had killed.

"Get me that bag," he gasped, seizing hold of the saddle on his horse for support. "Get it for me, and I will give you a shilling."

"I'll fetch it if you take me with you," said Deut. "I don't care if I am only ten. I can't wait all my life to be a robber. Will you take me?"

"Yes," said Carleycroft, pulling his horse's forelock. The good nag sank down on its knees—a trick that he had taught it, so, no matter how far gone in liquor he might be, he was always able to mount—and, as the little lad brought him the attorney's bundle, he lurched into the saddle. Then, when the horse had risen slowly to its feet, he picked the child from the ground with the last of his failing strength, and, true to his promise, the two rode down the highway together, the boy half mad with wild delight, the man swaying in his saddle, cursing, bleeding, dying, but game to the last, looking death in the face without fear or falter. Not two minutes later Cap-

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tain Fortescue stooped beside the body of the dead man.

“More of Sir Hillary’s work,” he muttered.
“Well, this evening ends it. The devil himself cannot pass these roads to-night.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

“LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

ABOUT five minutes passed uneventfully at the Grenville Arms after I left it to follow the two gay strangers. Quite alone, seated by the little fire as before, Sir Hillary, deep in sad thoughts of the happy past and hopeless future, was roused by the sudden opening of the door. He richly deserved to lose his life as punishment for courting danger by remaining alone in the public room of the inn; but this was no enemy who entered. He gave a cry of astonishment and rose to his feet, for it was Charity. She ran to him with outstretched hands, and he made as though to fold her in his arms, but she stepped back quickly.

“Not that, Hillary,” she said, sadly. “Have you forgotten?”

“Like you, Charity, when I forget I shall be dead,” he answered, calmly, though his heart was filled with a sickening tumult of love and despair.

“When do you go away?” she asked.

“In three days,” he answered. “I shall live in Paris, in all likelihood, and am thinking seriously of joining the army of King Louis.”

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"To fight against England?" she asked, horrified. Hillary laughed bitterly.

"England has turned against me," he answered, "but, though I owe little save hate and enmity to her people, never fear that I shall draw my sword against her. What has brought you here, Charity?"

"Oh," she said, with a sigh, "I feared that you were soon going abroad, and felt that I must see you once more."

"But why?" said he. "You are promised to Humphrey."

At this moment a face appeared at the window, where, near the bottom, there was a space of some six inches width uncovered by the scanty curtain. As the nose flattened against the glass the eyes blazed with rage and astonishment; then, as Charity detected this spy with an exclamation of alarm, he disappeared from view.

"A man looked in at us," she cried.

"Some trooper or constable, no doubt," said Hillary. "Well, it matters but little after all."

"Conceal yourself, Hillary!" she urged, in terror.

"There is no use in so doing," he answered. "If he recognized me they will burn down the inn to find me. If he did not know me it is not worth while."

Sir Humphrey Berkely entered and closed the door behind him; then stood with folded arms, an ironical smile upon his lips as he surveyed them.

Hillary drew a quick breath, and for the moment his wound and weakness were forgotten. He remem-

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bered only that the man who was robbing him of the woman he loved stood before him, and the blood of hate and madness rose boiling to his brain; yet, when he spoke, his voice was cool and steady.

"Good-evening, cousin," she said, calmly. "You are enjoying good health?"

Sir Humphrey laughed, and his great teeth gleamed white and fierce like the cruel beast he was.

"The highwayman," said he. "The highwayman, by all that is holy!"

"You lie, you cur!" answered Hillary, as softly and gently as though what he said was a compliment instead of an insult. Then suddenly his wrath blazed out.

"You villain!" he cried. "We are well met to-night. You have robbed me of the woman I love, and with your lying testimony forced me to fly for my life. You gave me this wound that has prevented my seeking safety abroad. You, whom I would have loved like a brother had you but willed it so, have been my ruin, and to-night, 'fore God, you shall pay for it!"

Hillary staggered and caught the mantel for support lest he fall, and Sir Humphrey, seeing how little strength the lad possessed, determined to put an end to him then and there.

"Brandy," said Hillary, weakly. "Get me some brandy."

The girl took the decanter from the table and poured out a little in a glass, which she gave to her lover. This he swallowed while she put the brandy back

where she had found it, as Sir Humphrey gave a sneering laugh, and drew his sword with a gesture that sent the candle-light sparkling and dancing from the polished steel.

“A charming sight, i’ faith!” cried he. “Beauty tending suffering. As you say, Sir Cut-purse, we *are* well met. His Gracious Majesty has honored you by offering one thousand pounds for your capture dead or alive, and as I have a few monments to spare, and do not disdain the reward, I think I will earn the money, that I may present it to my wife upon our wedding-day.”

“You are over sure,” said Hillary, “for my life is still my own, and you may never see that sad day.”

“You must not fight him!” cried Charity, in an agony of fear. “Humphrey, you will not ask it. It is madness, Hillary, when you have so little strength. He will kill you.”

Sir Humphrey smiled but did not speak.

“If he does put an end to me,” said Sir Hillary, gently, “will it not be best after all? God knows death will be welcome now. There will be no exile for me then, dear heart—no years of sorrow and loneliness. All will be peace and rest, and I—I am weary, Charity—oh, *so* weary!”

Sir Humphrey stepped forward with his most elegant bow. “Your pardon,” he said, politely, “but I fancy the decision in this matter rests with me, and I say he shall fight me.”

“You coward!” cried the girl, turning on him

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with scorn and hate written on her face. "You miserable coward!"

"Have I not cause for wrath?" he went on, placidly. "I find my cousin keeping tryst with the girl who is my promised wife, in a tavern of ill-repute, alone, and late at night. My honor demands satisfaction."

Sir Hillary struck him a blow on his sneering lips that sent him reeling back, with his face stung and bleeding.

"Take that for your insult!" he cried, as he drew his sword, and when Humphrey, half mad with rage, sprang forward, the duel began. Charity, trembling with fear, yet fascinated by the sight, stood by the door with her hands clinched and her eyes wild and staring. The fight went briskly on, for though Hillary under ordinary circumstances was a far better swordsman than Sir Humphrey, he was so weak from his wound that it was a fair match, with skill struggling against strength for the mastery.

If the combat had been allowed to continue undisturbed to a legitimate finish, it is difficult to say how it might have ended, for while Hillary's superior skill kept him from hurt, his strength began to leave him, and he realized that he must end the battle speedily or never fight again.

All at once Charity gave a cry of fear and horror, for until now she had not fully grasped the awful situation. If Hillary killed Humphrey it would be the signal for the London lawyer, so she thought, to bring the documents which so hopelessly compro-

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mised her father to the notice of the King; and yet what would there be in life for her if it was her lover who fell?

For a moment Hillary was off his guard, as his glance wavered at the sound of her voice, but his sword so locked that of his antagonist that it was impossible for him to be treacherously thrust through. Sir Humphrey, realizing this, made no such attempt. Instead he deliberately struck Hillary a heavy blow on his half-healed wound with his fist, thus tearing it open. With a cry Hillary fell against the table on which stood the candles lighting the inn. Over it went, and as Hillary recovered his balance darkness wrapped the room, and, save for a red gleam from the fireplace, all was black within the Grenville Arms.

Then the rattle of steel, clinking with a clear, ringing note that was almost musical, began, though neither of the swordsmen could be seen.

"Light!" cried Sir Hillary. "Give me light!"

Sir Humphrey laughed triumphantly, for the darkness gave him the advantage, and he knew that Hillary's strength was fast bleeding away. Charity tore open the door, but the moon had set and the night outside was as dark as the interior of the tavern.

"Light, for God's sake!" gasped Sir Hillary, who now had but one chance. If he could see to execute the manœuvre he would attempt the Dart of Sicily, and if that failed him death would be near at hand.

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"You will have no light," hissed Sir Humphrey, "unless it be from the fires of hell. Think of her as my wife. While you lie cold in earth she will slumber with her dainty head pillowed on my breast, dreaming of you, no doubt, but my wife—*my wife*," and he laughed triumphantly.

"Damn you!" gasped Sir Hillary, beaten back for a second time. He grasped the edge of the only table which had not been upset in the struggle. Suddenly he gave a wild scream of triumph. Springing forward, his sword met that of Sir Humphrey, and then he gave ground before him, leading him nearer and nearer to the fireplace.

"Now say your prayers, Sir Humphrey," he cried, "for you will have need of them!"

There was a smash of glass in the fireplace, and, as a blue flash for one moment lit up the old inn with a pale, uncanny light, Charity saw Hillary thrust, parry, and thrust again like lightning. Then Sir Humphrey's sword flew into the air, and he fell backward to the floor with my dear lad's blade in his heart.

Hillary had made light by breaking the decanter of brandy in the fire.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GABRIEL CARLEYCROFT GOES TO SEEK LADY CLARE

I REACHED the Grenville Arms breathless from my long run, and found Mistress Charity unconscious beside the fire, and Hillary in a great arm-chair half fainting from loss of blood, while at the centre of the room lay Sir Humphrey with the lad's sword thrust through his treacherous heart.

"In Heaven's name!" I cried, "get to your hiding-place. The country is swarming with soldiers."

"Is it so?" said he. "Then it is scarcely worth my while to stanch this reopened wound."

I cursed him, and with trembling fingers bandaged the hurt, then helped him up the stairs to the secret recess of the chimney, though neither of us had any hope of his escaping discovery this time. When I came down to the room below I found that Mistress Charity had left the place, and I hoped that she had returned home. There was the rattle of hoofs on the road, and in a moment up to the door, with distended nostrils and heaving sides, came Carleycroft's gallant horse, with Gabriel and a tiny lad upon his back. I saw at a glance that the man had been terribly hurt, for death shone on his face, and his lips were red with blood.

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"Lorrimer!" he cried. "What luck to find you here," and he slid from the saddle to the ground.

"I'll take 'em off your track," said the child, and before we could restrain him the horse galloped off in the night, with the brave little boy clinging on his back, as in the distance from both directions on the highway the sound of cavalry approaching came plainly to our ears.

Carleycroft staggered into the inn and fell weakly on a bench before the fire. I sought for the brandy, but found none, then, breaking open a cupboard, discovered there was a flask of wine, and with a glassful of this revived him.

"Lock the door!" he gasped. "The soldiers are following me. I killed the lawyer in fair fight, but he gave me as good as I sent him, damn him! These papers are for Master Holliston. With them he can defy Berkely."

"Sir Humphrey is dead," I said, pointing to the body on the floor. "Hillary killed him."

"My brave boy," he murmured, and cast the papers into the fire. "I am dying, Lorrimer, and now 'twill be an easy thing to prove Hillary innocent. Call the boy and let him claim that I died by his hand. They will pardon him, for you can say that it was I who killed the Duke of Chesney. Do you understand?"

"Yes, old friend, yes!" I cried, for now I saw new hope for my ward. The trample of the troopers drew rapidly nearer and nearer, but for a moment he could not speak.

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"Then I shall not have suffered in vain since I save *her* boy from sorrow," he whispered. "He must never know his father."

"I will never tell him," I said, choking back a sob, for it was pitiful to hear this strong man fighting for breath, and to see him dying with only one thought in his mind—how to save the son he had learned to love too late.

"It is the end," he murmured. "Let the book be closed, for the tale is done."

With a last effort he rose to his feet and stood with arms outstretched, a strange smile on his face.

"Clare," he murmured. "My love, my own! Yes, I am coming to you now. She smiles—she forgives! My love, my darling, *at last!*"

I caught him in my arms and let him sink gently to the floor. He smiled and pressed my hand. And thus it was that England's most famous highwayman, after years and years of crime and evil doing, died in content and peace, rejoiced by the thought that his death would bring his boy back to happiness and freedom; died with his great generous heart full of love for the woman who years before had robbed him of all, and it was with her name upon his lips that his soul stole softly from him in the shadow of a sigh.

When the troopers broke down the door and came swarming into the inn they found Sir Hillary with a smoking pistol in his hand kneeling beside the body of a man whom Fortescue recognized as the swords-

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man who had beaten him so easily on the highway.

"At last," he cried, "I have caught you, Sir Hillary Grenville, or Jack Midnight, whichever you choose to be called!"

"I am Sir Hillary Grenville," said the lad, proudly, though there were tears in his eyes brought there by the death of the man whom he had so soon learned to love and admire.

"Pshaw!" cried the captain, flushed with triumph. "Bring in the girl and the child also."

Charity entered, with her hand clasped firmly by Deut's little brown palm. Fortescue had done well this night, for not a creature had passed through the network of soldiers he had spread round the Grenville Arms. With a little cry the girl ran to Hillary's side. "Oh, my love," she whispered, "is this the end of all?"

He folded her in his arms, and pressed his face close to hers.

"It is the beginning," he answered—"the beginning of a new life, but love is unchanged, and so shall it be for ever and ever."

There was a sudden stir at the door, and the two strange gentlemen with whom we had played cards, entered.

"Who may you two be?" demanded Fortescue, then he dropped on one knee and doffed his hat.

"Your Majesty," said he, and bowed his head.

Charles laughed and bade him rise.

"Perhaps," said his Grace of Buckingham, "since

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he has recognized us—I should say, *you*—the captain will be kind enough to explain this exciting scene?"

"Do so," said the King, eying Charity with much interest, while Deut, still retaining his grip on her hand, stared at royalty, and decided he would rather be a highwayman.

"Your Majesty," said Fortescue, swelling with pride, "I have captured Jack Midnight."

"Your Majesty," said I, stepping forward, "the captain is mistaken."

"Sir!" cried Fortescue, in a great rage.

"I am Sir Hillary Grenville," said the lad, bravely. "Jack Midnight lies there on the floor dead."

As Buckingham bent over the body of poor Carleycroft, the King looked sternly at the young baronet, and I felt hope die within me.

"Is it so?" said Charles. "Od's fish!"

"Your Majesty," I said, desperately, "to-night you told us that the King would gladly pardon Sir Hillary, if, with his protestations of innocence, he brought the body of the outlaw whose likeness to him has been the lad's undoing. There lies the proof you asked for, with Sir Hillary's bullet in his breast, and here I boldly declare once and for all time that Sir Hillary is a brave and honest gentleman, and one of your Majesty's most devoted servants. To-night they quarrelled, and this highwayman sought to rob the lad of the life he had once given him, and, instead, lost his own. Your Majesty, Sir Hillary Grenville throws himself upon your mercy."

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I could say no more, and in fear and trembling we three stood there together, waiting for the King to speak.

"They are as like as brothers," said his Grace of Buckingham, returning to the King. "It is all as plain as a pikestaff."

"I fear," said his Majesty, "that Lady Castlemaine is doomed to disappointment to-morrow."

"Sire," said Buckingham, "Sir Hillary, and, if I mistake not, the future Lady Grenville are waiting."

"So they are," said the King, as though he had quite forgotten us, and again I felt my heart sink within me.

His Majesty went to the table on which stood the wine I had taken from the cupboard. Carefully he poured out the ruby liquid and filled two glasses to the brim before he spoke. Then he turned to Fortescue, and with a mimicry that was really extraordinary in its likeness to Sir Hillary's defence of him made hardly an hour before, said:

"You declare this man to be a villain, and why? Say what you will, he is a gentleman, and if he is no Puritan neither are you nor I. What if he has been free and easy of morals? He merely asked and they gave to him, so surely he was not to blame. He is a good fellow or I do not know one. Damme, had I his chance I would be a devilish sight worse I am certain."

"Your Majesty," cried Fortescue, but Charles paid no heed to his words.

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"So I will forgive your rash accusation," he said to the captain, "since you are so eager to apologize."

"Apologize," prompted his Grace of Buckingham, poking Fortescue in the ribs.

"Your pardon, Sir," stammered the dazed soldier, his eyes bulging with astonishment.

"Gallantly done," said the King. "George, we will drink his health in bumpers."

They each seized a glass and cried together:

"To Sir Hillary Grenville. Long life and happiness!"

"But," said Sir Hillary, advancing, with Charity clinging around his neck in a delirium of joy, "your Majesty, I do not understand. *Am I free?*"

It seemed too much happiness to come to pass, and I, also, could scarcely believe that we had heard aright.

"Free?" said the King. "As much so as the air. Nay, I am wrong, Sir Hillary, for *what man is free with a woman's arms around his neck?*"

"God save the King!" I shouted, and the cheer, repeated by the troopers, burst out through the windows and doors of the Grenville Arms, and echoed and re-echoed on the cool, damp air of the night.

There is little more to be said, for within the year Sir Hillary, with all his wealth and lands restored to him, married Mistress Charity in her own home, with her father's full consent.

Of their married life I have only to say that could

THE SON OF CARLEYCROFT

I have been sure of such content as fell to their lot I would never have remained a bachelor, but, as it is, I have all the advantages of matrimony without the annoyance of a wife, for to me Hillary's children are as dear as any of my own could ever be.

Years afterwards my ward, who it seems had always suspected the truth after that night at the Grenville Arms where Gabriel Carleycroft met his untimely end, asked me to tell him the story, and, finding that most of the sad tale of his mother's hapless love was already known to him, I felt it no sin to finish the romance that naught might remain to him a secret.

Master Ezekiel Deuteronomy Bunt is now steward of the Grenville estates, and no longer desirous of being a king, a pirate, a highwayman, or even an angel. Two children are playing on the floor beside me, as I write. One, a boy, raises his head with an inquiring look when I say "Lorrimer!" The little girl bears her mother's name. The light is growing dim, and I shall write no more to-night.

Sometimes in my musings by the fireside I wonder if the opinion of many is right—if it is true that man's laws are also the laws of God? For if this be so the soul of Gabriel Carleycroft must of necessity be denied an entrance to the realm of celestial bliss. But then ever comes one thought that is like balm to a wound in its sweetness and peace, for should the soul of Gabriel Carleycroft turn away, down from the Heaven that disdained him would come the

THE DEATH OF CARLEYCROFT

spirit of his lost love that they might be together, and if in the worlds beyond they shall be free to love and to be loved forever and forever, I know that they will find all happiness, for in the joy of each for the other is their Paradise.

THE END.

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